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## The Honorable Elders

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The  
Honorable Elders  
Revisited

(Otoshiyori Saikō)

A Revised Cross-cultural  
Analysis of  
Aging in Japan

Erdman B. Palmore and  
Daisaku Maeda

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Durham

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to Brydie Palmore  
and Kei Kudo Maeda  
who make growing older  
exciting



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## Preface to the First Edition



The bowl with a gift  
of *kaki*<sup>1</sup> is returned with  
*origami*<sup>2</sup> swan.<sup>3</sup>

The Japanese make it a point of honor to always repay gifts and favors, even if the repayment is only a token one. I cannot hope to repay adequately the many generous services and gracious help that I have been given, both in Japan and in the United States, which have made this book possible. The following acknowledgments of the main institutions and persons who contributed to this project are only small tokens, like the *origami* swan, of my indebtedness and gratitude.

This book is based on materials and observations gathered in Japan during my sabbatical leave in 1973. My initial thanks, therefore, go to Duke University for providing support during this leave. Travel funds were provided by a Duke Bio-medical Sciences Support Grant (#5-S05-RR07070-07). Thanks are also due the Duke Center for the Study of Aging and Human Development, the Department of Psychiatry, and the Department

1. A large sweet variety of persimmon.

2. The Japanese art of folding paper to represent animals or flowers.

3. These poems at the beginning of each chapter are in the classic *haiku* form of three lines, with five syllables in the first and third lines and seven syllables in the second line. *Haiku* also usually contain some reference to a season or the weather. For example, in the above *haiku*, the *kaki* is a symbol of autumn. All the *haiku* in this book are by Erdman Palmore.

of Sociology for allowing me time to study Japanese before my trip to Japan and time to complete the book after my return. Partial support for completion of the book was provided by USPH grant #HD-00668.

Fortunately, Japan has some of the best statistics in the world on their aged population, as shown by the tables in this book. Unfortunately, few of these statistics had been translated into English. Therefore, while it was unnecessary for me to conduct a large-scale survey to secure the needed information, it was necessary to review hundreds of tables published by various government agencies and private institutions and to translate those relevant to this analysis.

In order to facilitate this work, the Tokyo Institute of Gerontology generously provided office space and staff assistance. Special thanks go to Mr. Daisaku Maeda and his staff in the Social Welfare Section for providing materials and answering my many questions. Miss Yoshiko Someya spent many patient hours helping me review and translate the tables. However, any inaccuracies and awkwardness in the translations should be blamed on my limited knowledge of Japanese.

Mr. Mikio Mori, Expert on Aging at the Ministry of Health and Welfare, not only arranged for a series of questions from the Shanas cross-cultural survey of the aged to be included in the 1973 Japan Survey of the Aged (in order to facilitate direct comparison with the United States, England, and Denmark), but also was generally helpful in providing me with materials, contacts, sponsorship, and living arrangements.

I cannot list all the people in Japan I have interviewed or who have informally discussed this fascinating topic with me, but my appreciation for their help is not diminished by their anonymity. My students in sociology at Sophia University made a special contribution to this book through their cooperation in two class projects investigating deference toward the aged and the changing status of Japanese aged.

Preliminary drafts of the manuscript were read and valuable suggestions were made by Peyton Palmore III, P. Lee Palmore, Sr., Jae Jong Kim, Robert Atchley, Donald Cowgill, Mikio Mori, Daisaku Maeda, Yoshiko Someya, and David Plath. My



intellectual debts to such theorists as Max Weber and Talcott Parsons will become obvious. Ethel Shanas and Donald Cowgill are the two pioneers in cross-cultural gerontology who have most stimulated my interest in this field. Peyton Palmore and his family helped in innumerable ways to make our visit to Japan productive and a joy we will always remember.

My wife, Brydie Palmore, contributed the drawings that illustrate my *haiku* introducing each chapter.

Finally, in a book about honorable elders it is particularly appropriate to acknowledge my debt to my honorable parents, Rev. and Mrs. P. Lee Palmore, Sr. Not only did they have the foresight to give birth to me in Japan and to let me stay there my first six years, but they also have encouraged and fed my continuing interest in Japan ever since.

Erdman B. Palmore, 1975



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## Preface to the Revised Edition

The first edition of *The Honorable Elders* was greeted with considerable interest and controversy, as shown by the criticisms reviewed below. A frequent question raised was whether the differences we found between Japan and other countries were lasting differences or only temporary differences that would soon fade with Japan's "Westernization" (a "cultural lag" phenomenon). We believed the differences were so large and profound that they would last for the foreseeable future; but without much trend data we could not test this belief.

In order to get more trend data, to update the statistics, and to answer our critics, the senior author returned to Japan for another sabbatical leave in 1984 and asked Daisaku Maeda to help revise the book. Maeda is uniquely qualified to do this both because he is Director of the Department of Sociology at the Tokyo Metropolitan Institute on Gerontology and because he is one of the few Japanese social gerontologists who has lived in the United States and is fluent in English.

We believe that the results of our collaboration on this revision strongly support the prediction that the major differences between elders in Japan and other countries will persist in the future despite the many changes that have occurred. Furthermore, our major conclusions in this revision are similar to those

in the first edition, although this revision focuses more on the trends and more explicitly recognizes the declines in status and integration that have occurred.

There have been at least sixteen reviews of the first edition. The majority were mostly favorable, but most also had some criticisms. We have done an analysis of these criticisms and found that there were about ten different kinds. We have revised the text to take into account those criticisms that appeared valid, but we will take this opportunity to explicitly respond to all ten kinds.

1. *Rosy View*. The most frequent criticism was that the book presents a romantic, overly "rosy view," ignoring the many problems of Japanese elders. We want to emphasize that we do not mean to imply that Japanese elders have no problems. We are both well aware of the multiple problems of most elders in Japan and other countries, and we have both written extensively about these problems elsewhere. We have revised the text to recognize more of these problems and have added a section on "Suggestions for Japan" to balance the section on "Suggestions for the United States" (chapter 9). However, our main focus in this book is on a comparison of elders in Japan with elders elsewhere, and our main thesis is simply *that compared to other industrialized countries*, Japan continues to provide higher integration and status for its elders. Japanese elders may even have as many problems as other elders do, but they have fewer problems of integration and status.

2. *Deny Decline*. A similarly frequent criticism was that we denied the substantial declines in status and integration of Japanese elders. On the contrary, we explicitly recognize that their status and integration have declined substantially from a peak when Japan was an agricultural society. But we argue that because their status and integration were so high, this decline still leaves large differences between the situations of Japanese elders and those in other countries. Furthermore, the trends indicate that these large differences will persist for the foreseeable future.

3. *Deny Economics*. A third frequent criticism was that we overemphasized cultural factors and denied the influence of economic factors on the proportions of elders living with children

and the proportions of elders who were employed. On the contrary, we recognize (as the surveys show) that some elders do live with their children or continue to work primarily because of economic necessity. Furthermore, we recognize that the structure of the labor market with more employment in primary industries and more self-employment, as well as the greater demand for labor, all contribute to greater employment opportunities for the elders. However, the surveys also show that noneconomic factors are more frequently the primary reasons for elders living with children and continuing to work.

4. *Reduced Employment Status.* A related criticism was that we did not recognize the reduced status and pay in employment of the elders who continue to work after "retirement" from their regular jobs. On the contrary, we explicitly recognize the drop in earnings after retirement (a decline of 17 to 33 percent) and the drop in prestige and responsibility of most post-retirement jobs (chapter 5, "Retirement"). However, we argue that the continuation of any kind of employment shows more integration in the labor force and higher employment status than no employment at all. Apparently the majority of Japanese elders would rather have a lower-status job after retirement than no job at all, given present levels of retirement benefits.

5. *Invalid Statistics.* Some reviewers questioned the validity of survey statistics in general and especially in Japan where (they argue) social desirability bias is stronger than elsewhere. We recognize the validity of this problem and agree that one should be cautious in interpreting results of surveys. However, we argue that the survey results are consistent with the "hard" data on living arrangements, employment, and demography, and that the survey method is the most accurate and feasible approach to estimate the prevalence of various subjective attitudes and motivations.

6. *Suicide Rates.* Some critics were impressed with the higher suicide rates among elders in Japan compared to the United States, and asserted that these rates prove that Japanese elders are more unhappy or mentally ill than U.S. elders. We believe there is abundant evidence that these higher rates are primarily due to the greater acceptability of suicide in Japan, especially

for elders who are terminally ill or are an intolerable burden on their care-givers. In any case, we point out that despite the higher rates, suicide is actually rare among Japanese elders, constituting only 1 percent of their deaths. Therefore, suicides represent the reactions of only a tiny portion of the most unfortunate elders and are not symptomatic of general unhappiness or mental illness among the other 99 percent (see chapter 3).

7. *Sex Discrimination*. Three critics said we had ignored sex differences and sex discrimination. As a matter of fact, we did point out sex differences in several places, especially sex differences in family roles; but it is true that we did not focus on sex discrimination. We recognize that this is a serious problem in Japan, as in most countries, and that there may be more discrimination against women in Japan than in the United States. However, our primary purpose is to compare age differences and age discrimination among Japan and other countries, and attempting to deal with sex differences (or other differences such as race and region) would unnecessarily complicate and confuse our analysis.

8. *Silver Seats*. Two critics pointed out that the fact that the railways and subways found it necessary to designate Silver Seats for the aged and handicapped was really an indication of decline in respect for elders. We agree that this is an indication of decline in respect (especially when some younger people ignore the designation), but we argue that it is also an indication that respect for elders is still an ideal that influences policy and some behaviors. Again, the point is the contrast with other countries that have no such policy on trains or subways (although some cities have recently started such a policy on their subway lines).

9. *Age Structure*. One critic wrote that we had ignored differences between the age structure of Japanese and U.S. elders and that these differences would largely account for the other differences between Japanese and U.S. elders. As a matter of fact, Japanese elders are about two years younger than U.S. elders on the average (Office for the Aged, 1981), but this small difference could hardly account for the massive differences in proportions of elders living with children, proportions in the labor force, etc.

10. Finally, a few critics pointed out that although Palmore was born and spent his early childhood in Japan, he is primarily a gerontologist rather than a Japanologist. This is true, and for this reason he asked Maeda to become coauthor in order to correct any errors the first edition might have had and to add the viewpoint of a Japanese gerontologist to that of the American gerontologist.

As before, the senior author wishes to thank the Duke University Center for the Study of Aging and Human Development and the Tokyo Metropolitan Institute on Gerontology for providing support during his visits to Japan. During his 1984 visit the Institute provided a generous fellowship as well as a convenient apartment, office space, staff assistance, and warm hospitality, all of which contributed to a productive as well as enjoyable visit. Akitoshi Nishishita in the Sociology Department of the Tokyo Institute was especially helpful in finding new statistics for this revision. Shuuichi Sakata, also from the Institute, was kind enough to do the calligraphy for the cover of the book. We also wish to thank Dr. Jun Katata, Professor of Anthropology at Fukuoka University, for his review of this revision, as well as his translation of it into Japanese. Drs. Gerda Fillenbaum and George Maddox of Duke University, and Peyton Palmore, reviewed the manuscript and made valuable suggestions.

In this revision we have used updated statistics for most of the tables and have rewritten about half of the text. We hope this revision will clarify the issues raised by the first edition and will provide a useful base for future cross-cultural research on aging.

Erdman B. Palmore and Daisaku Maeda, 1985





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Introduction

*The Honorable  
Elders: golden autumn years  
or empty slogan?*

Just as old age is a universal phenomenon, there has been an almost universal increase in the number of older people and in the proportion of the old in the total population. This is an inevitable result of both declining birth and death rates. This increasing proportion, combined with social and economic changes resulting from industrialization, has in turn produced an increase in concern for "the problems of the aged." The problems of the aged are also problems for all the rest of society: the provision of appropriate roles, maintenance, medical care, etc. Furthermore, each of us has a personal interest in aging because, unless we die early, each of us will become an aged person.

Given these facts, the need for better understanding of old age is obvious. Less obvious may be the need for a cross-cultural analysis such as the present one. The need is both theoretical and practical. On the theoretical level, we cannot hope to establish a universally valid science of gerontology until we find out how well our theories about aging and the aged apply in other cultures. On the practical level, our vision of possible solutions to the problems of aging will be unnecessarily limited if we confine ourselves to the preconceptions and limited experiences of our country or even of Western culture. This book is basically

an attempt both to broaden the base for the emerging science of gerontology and to enlarge our vision of possible ways to improve the quality of our later years.

The rest of this chapter is a discussion of ways in which we hope to fulfill these purposes through a description and cross-cultural analysis of the aged in Japanese society.

#### PARADISE OR PURGATORY?

"The honorable elders" is a translation of the most common term used in Japan for the aged: *otoshiyori*. For example, the signs giving priority to the aged and handicapped on certain seats in trains use *otoshiyori*. The elements of this word literally mean "honorable age achieved." The adjective form, *toshiue*, literally means "age above," or "elder." It is true that in recent times *otoshiyori* has taken on patronizing connotations, but until recently it was considered the most respectful term to use for the aged. Another term is *Kōreisha*, which literally means "high age person." A third honorific term is *go-inkyō-sama*, which means an honorable retired person. A more neutral term is *rōjin*, which combines elements meaning a white-haired and stooped person. However, the fact that the more frequently used terms have respect and honor built into their roots is an indication of the high status traditionally enjoyed by older Japanese.

One of the main purposes of this analysis is to examine the extent to which this traditional respect for the aged continues in modern Japanese society. Some descriptions of the aged in Japan portray them as at the peak of the status and power structure, obeyed and venerated by their children and grandchildren, respected by all of society for their years of experience and accumulated wisdom (Buck, 1966; Benedict, 1946; Hearn, 1955). Some modern writers have implied the opposite extreme: that industrialization and rapid social change have transformed the aged into cast-out, useless relics of the past who are a burden at best and are often a nuisance and obstruction to modern progress and enlightenment (Plath, 1972; Niwa, 1962; Ariyoshi, 1972). This basic question of the present status and social inte-

gration of the aged in Japan provides a test of two general theories in gerontology.

#### MODERNIZATION AND THE AGED

One theory asserts that modernization causes low status and social integration for the aged (Cottrell, 1960; Cowgill and Holmes, 1972). It assumes that the status of the aged in preindustrial societies (or at least in stable agrarian societies) tends to be high because the aged tend to accumulate knowledge and wisdom through their years of experience and to build their power over land, extended family, government, religious, and other institutions. Industrialization, however, decreases the importance of land as a source of status, decreases the importance of the extended family, increases geographical mobility, and rapidly changes technology, social structure, and cultural values. Other aspects of modernization that theoretically reduce the status of the aged are the increase in urbanization, modern mass education, and the proportion of the aged. As applied to Japan, this theory would predict a relatively low status for the aged.

A similar theory may be derived from the Marxian tradition. Marxian theory asserts that culture and social structure are determined by the economic system and that a person's status is determined by his relationship to the means of production. But in capitalist industrialized societies most aged are retired and have *no* relationship to the means of production. Therefore, the status of the aged in industrialized societies should be relatively low according to this theory. Since Japan is now one of the most industrialized capitalist societies, the status of aged Japanese, according to this theory, would be among the lowest in the world.

Max Weber, however, opposed the Marxian theory and asserted that culture can have an independent effect on economic and social structure. For example, one of his main theses was that the Protestant ethic stimulated the rise of capitalism, rather than vice versa (Weber, 1930). Applying Weber's theory of the independent effect of culture to Japan, one might hypothesize

that the Oriental tradition of respect for elders would preserve higher status and integration of the aged despite industrialization and some decline in status. The evidence in this book will tend to support this hypothesis and therefore is relevant to the more general controversy between economic and cultural determinism. Japan provides a unique "test case" because of its unique combination of modern industrialization with older Oriental traditions.

#### DISENGAGEMENT

The second general theory in gerontology to which this evidence is relevant is disengagement theory (Cumming and Henry, 1961). Disengagement can occur on three levels: the physical, psychological, and social. Physical disengagement means a reduction in the amount of physical activity, a slowing down and conservation of energy. Psychological disengagement refers to the withdrawing of concern from the wider world to primary concern for people and things directly affecting oneself, a shifting of attention from the outer world to the inner world of one's own feelings and thoughts. It involves the reduction of mental and emotional energy. Similarly, social disengagement means the reduction of social activity and involvement, a "mutual withdrawal or 'disengagement' between the aging person and others in the social system."

Two main parts of disengagement theory have become most controversial. The first part states that disengagement is biologically inevitable as a person ages; therefore most older people, independent of ill health or poverty, in fact do progressively disengage as they become older. The second part states that disengagement is *good* for both the aged and society. It is good for the aged because it is an acceptance of the inevitable decline and death, a conservation of energy, as the best way to adapt to the declining abilities of old age. Therefore, disengaged older people tend to be happier and healthier than those who try to remain more active. Disengagement is good for society because it gradually can transfer the functions previously performed by the aged

to the young, and thus society can avoid the problems caused by increasing incompetence or inevitable death of the aged.

Both parts of this theory have been widely attacked and defended, with scores of articles presenting evidence and arguments on one side or the other. Suffice it to say here that the weight of the evidence is generally against both parts of the disengagement theory, at least in the unequivocal form stated above. As for the first part, disengagement is not inevitable, except shortly before death, and many older people show little or no overall disengagement. As for the second part, most evidence indicates that disengaged older people tend to be more unhappy, lonelier, sicker, and die sooner than more active older people.

The evidence from Japan is relevant to disengagement theory in three ways. First, the Japanese elders tend to be more active in the family and in the labor force than aged in other industrial societies. In fact, the majority of Japanese leaders are elderly. This shows that although some disengagement may be biologically inevitable, the amount and kind of disengagement are largely determined by the culture and social structure. Second, Japanese elders have as high or higher levels of health and satisfaction as do elders in other countries. Third, among the Japanese elders the more active are also more satisfied and have better health than the more disengaged. This suggests that activity, rather than disengagement, tends to promote health and satisfaction.

#### SUGGESTIONS

While Japan is no paradise for the aged, and even though it is often difficult to transplant practices or attitudes from one culture to another, many Japanese practices and attitudes may suggest ways in which the quality of later life in the United States could be improved. These range from the simple practice of giving the aged and handicapped priority on certain designated seats in commuting trains to the complex set of attitudes and practices that result in almost twice as many of the aged

in Japan being employed as in the United States. This is another purpose of this book: to describe such promising ideas and suggest ways in which they might be adopted in the United States. Similarly, we will discuss some ways in which Japan might benefit by adopting some ideas from the United States.

#### BASIC DESCRIPTIONS

In addition to the above purposes, the basic social and attitudinal characteristics of Japan's older population will be presented. This is the first time that most of this basic information has been made available to the West. This fact is surprising in view of the extensive and high-quality statistics on Japanese aged. It probably is another reflection of the culture-bound nature of most Western gerontology. Even the pioneering cross-cultural survey by Shanas and her associates (1968) was limited to three *Western* societies. *Aging and Modernization* by Cowgill and Holmes (1972) was the first book to attempt general descriptions of the aged in *all* types of societies around the world. While that book made an outstanding contribution to comparative gerontology, its attempt to survey the entire world meant that little in-depth and quantitative analysis was possible. The earlier cross-cultural work of Leo Simmons was limited to pre-industrial societies (1960). *The International Handbook on Aging* (Palmore, 1980) is a useful reference on gerontology in twenty-eight countries, but it contains little explicit cross-cultural analysis. Thus, we hope that the present volume will make a contribution to the growing body of cross-cultural knowledge and theory and will aid in the development of a truly international science of gerontology.

#### METHODS

A variety of data will be utilized, both quantitative and non-quantitative. Most of the statistical data on older Japanese come from a series of surveys conducted by the Japanese Census Bureau, the Ministry of Health and Welfare, the Prime Minister's Office, and the Tokyo Metropolitan Government. The In-



ternational Survey of the Life and Attitudes of the Old (Office for the Aged, 1981) was especially useful because of its recency and its comparable data for four industrial societies: Japan, the United States, Great Britain, and France. All of these surveys are of a high quality, being based on probability samples of at least a thousand persons in each country. Standard survey techniques of sample selection, interviewer training, interviewing procedure, and data processing were used.

In all surveys there is the problem of social desirability bias that influences an unknown proportion of responses toward more "desirable" answers; this may be a greater problem in Japan with its emphasis on "saving face." This caution should be borne in mind when comparative survey statistics are presented.

Whenever possible, we compare statistics on Japan with those on other countries. We also present trend data to analyze the extent of change in the situations of Japanese aged. Thus, the analysis is not only cross-cultural, but cross-temporal as well. In addition, we often use cross-tabulations by sex, age, density of population, education, and health in order to analyze the effects of these factors on the basic statistics. This kind of analysis helps in making inferences about the future, the effects of urbanization, of disengagement, and so forth.

In order to compare the social status of the aged relative to the non-aged, both over time and between countries, we use the Equality Index (EI). The EI may be described in several ways. It is the proportion of two groups' percentage distributions that overlap each other. Or, it is the sum of the smaller of the two percentages in each category when two percentage distributions are compared. It can be thought of as the percentage of complete equality, because 100 would mean there is complete identity between the two groups' distributions, and 50 would mean that 50 percent of the inferior group would have to move upward to equal the higher group. As used in this book, the lower the EI, the lower the status of the aged relative to the non-aged in terms of occupation, education, or whatever characteristic is being compared.

For example, table 1-1 presents the 1980 industry distribu-

Table 1-1. Industry of employed persons by age, Japan, 1980 (percentage distribution)

Industry	15-64	65+	EI
Primary	10	35	10
Secondary	34	19	19
Tertiary	56	46	46
Total	100	100	75

Source: Japan Census Bureau, 1980.

tions of employed persons aged 15-64 and persons over 65. Fewer younger persons were in the primary industries (10 percent compared to 35 percent of the aged) and fewer of the aged were in the secondary and tertiary industries. The EI is the sum of these lesser percentages: 10 plus 19 plus 46, which equals 75 (third column of table 1-1). This shows that in terms of industry, the aged were 75 percent similar to the non-aged. To achieve equality with the non-aged, 25 percent of the aged would have to move out of the lower-paying primary industries into the secondary and tertiary industries.

There are several advantages of the EI over the other measures that have been used to compare equality between groups: it ranges from a true zero to 100; it can be used with any kind of quantitative data (ordinal, nominal, or interval); it is not subject to the heavy influence of a few extreme cases; it reflects general changes in distribution as well as in central tendency; and it is easier to calculate and understand than most other indexes (Palmore and Manton, 1974).

The nonquantitative methods used in this study include personal observations; descriptions of public programs for the elders; interviews with gerontologists, with government officials, with older Japanese, and with younger Japanese; reviews of the literature on older Japanese; and illustrations drawn from Japanese stories and novels about the elders.



## SUMMARY

The universal increase in the numbers of older persons combined with rapid social change have produced increasing concern with problems of the aged. Cross-cultural analysis of the aged is necessary both to develop a universally valid science of gerontology and to enlarge our vision of possible ways to improve the quality of the later years. A basic question for this book is, "What is the present status and social integration of the aged in Japan?" The answers to this question provide a "test case" for the theory that modernization causes low status and integration of the aged; they also provide evidence opposing the theory of disengagement. Another purpose is to describe those practices and attitudes in Japan and the United States that might be useful in improving the situation of aged in the other country. Finally, the book provides the basic social and attitudinal characteristics of older Japanese. This is the first time most of this basic information has been made available to the West. We use a variety of methods in this analysis, including the Equality Index, cross-tabulations by time, by country, age, density, education, and health, as well as illustrations drawn from observations, interviews, and the literature on Japan.

## The Setting and the Tradition



The Chrysanthemum,  
the Sword;<sup>1</sup> old, new; East and West;  
blend of many things

(☆) A major thesis of this book is that, while the economic system in Japan has become similar to that of other industrialized nations, Japan's distinctive social system and cultural traditions have nevertheless maintained a relatively high degree of integration for the aged. Hence, it is important to establish both the similarity of the economic system to those in the West, as well as the distinctiveness of the Japanese sociocultural system.

### MODERN JAPAN

The Japan archipelago spans a range of latitude roughly 30° to 46° north, or approximately the same as New Orleans to Minneapolis. Thus, the climate is comparable to that of the eastern United States, but generally warmer than that of northern Europe.

(☆) The population is about one-half that of the United States, but Japan's population is crowded into one-twenty-fifth the area of the United States (table 2-1). Japan's population density is fourteen times as great as that of the United States, although not much greater than Great Britain's. Thus, density cannot explain the

1. *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* by Ruth Benedict is a classic description of the dual aesthetic and aggressive characteristics of the Japanese.

Table 2-1. Comparative statistics on Japan, the United States, Great Britain, and France (1980-81)

Statistic	Japan	United States	Great Britain	France
Area (square miles in 1,000)	143	3,614	94	213
Population (in millions)	118	230	56	54
Density (per square mile)	825	58	593	254
Percentage urban	75	74	78	73
Gross domestic product (GDP) (billions)	\$990	\$2,626	\$446	\$585
GDP per capita	\$8,390	\$11,417	\$7,960	\$10,833
Percentage of GDP from industrial activity	32	29	31	30
Percentage of GDP from agriculture	5	3	2	5
Per capita arable land (acres)	0.1	2.1	0.3	0.8
Birthrate (per 1,000)	13	25	14	15
Deathrate (per 1,000)	6	5	12	10
Natural increase (per 1,000)	7	20	2	5
Percentage age 65+	9	11	15	14

Sources: United Nations, 1981 and 1983; World Almanac, 1984.

large difference between Japan and Great Britain in proportions of the aged living with children.

Japan is one of the most industrialized nations in the world. About three-fourths of her population live in urban areas. Her gross domestic product (GDP) is second only to that of the United States (among noncommunist countries), and it is about twice as large as that of Britain and France. Her GDP per capita is somewhat more than Britain's but not yet as high as that in the United States and France. Slightly more of her GDP comes from industrial activity (manufacturing, mining, gas, electricity, and water) than any of the other three countries (table 2-1), but slightly more of it also comes from agriculture than in the United States and Great Britain. (Less of Japan's GDP comes from extractive, service, and other activities.)

One reason that Japan is so heavily industrialized is that her capacity to feed her people is restricted by the ruggedness of the terrain. About three-fourths of the country is nonarable, that is, too steeply graded for crop cultivation. Her per capita arable land is less than any of the other countries. Therefore, Japan needs to manufacture enough goods to trade for food and the necessities of modern life.

In order to maximize the crop yield from the limited arable space, Japanese farmers have resorted to various ingenious techniques, including the production of two crops a year in the southern part of the country, intensive cultivation, heavy use of natural and chemical fertilizers, terracing of upland fields, use of dikes to reclaim marshland, and elaborate irrigation projects.

Animal husbandry has received little attention in Japan, both because of the shortage of pastureland and because meat is a relatively inefficient way to produce food calories. The dairy industry is very small. Animal products still constitute a relatively small part of the Japanese diet, even though protein intake has more than doubled (and fat intake tripled) in the last twenty-five years (Asahi Newspaper, 1979). Instead, the Japanese derive over half their protein from cereals, soybeans, and soybean curd (*tōfu*)—soybeans having higher protein content than beef and fish (Economic Planning Agency, 1977). The average Japanese eats five times as much fish as the average American, but only one-seventh as much meat and less than one-third as much milk and dairy products. Japan has been the world's foremost fishing country for most of this century and accounts for about one-seventh of the world's fish catch.

Rice is the principal crop, followed by barley, wheat, soybeans, corn, and potatoes. The most important nonfood crops are silk, tea, and tobacco.

In both farming and fishing, older Japanese play a prominent role because younger people have tended to move to the cities and industries, while the older people have tended to stay on the farms and in the fishing villages. We will see that this is related to the high rate of continued employment among the aged (chapter 4).

Japan has been so successful at industrializing and exporting

that she has been one of the few nations able to maintain a positive trade balance. She continues to be a leading producer of motor vehicles, ships, textiles, electronic equipment, optical goods, and precision instruments.

Almost all Japanese are literate, as is true of populations in other industrial nations, but Japan spends more of her GDP on education than other countries do. This emphasis on education has contributed to her rapid industrialization and increases in GDP.

Her relatively low birth and death rates combine to produce a rapidly aging population. The percentage over age sixty-five is now almost as large as in the United States, and it is expected to equal that in Europe by the turn of the century, at about 16 percent. Furthermore, demographers predict that by the year 2015, as much as 23 percent of the population will be sixty-five or over (Kuroda, 1982). This would be the highest percentage of aged in the world.

#### SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAITS

Compared to the United States and Great Britain, Japan is a relatively homogeneous nation. Racially, most Japanese resemble the Mongoloids of China and northeast Asia, although there is some admixture from the Caucasoid Ainus and Malaysians from southeast Asia. The 656,000 Koreans are the only important ethnic minority in Japan.

In feudal times there was a pariah caste called *eta* who performed several of the menial occupations that were taboo to orthodox Buddhists, such as slaughter of animals, execution of criminals, and manufacture of footgear. The *eta* caste was theoretically abolished about a hundred years ago and they are now called *burakumin*, but true social equality is yet to be achieved. Intermarriage with *burakumin* is still frowned upon by most Japanese, and the ancient stigma still forces most of them into degrading occupations. However, known *burakumin* are now a relatively small group, and discrimination against them is declining.

Nearly all Japanese (except for 1 percent who are Christians) are at least nominally Buddhists or Shintoists, or both. This

homogeneity may facilitate the integration of the aged because there are few aged who must face the "double jeopardy" of being both aged and in a minority ethnic group.

Generalizations about the social-psychological traits of any people are, at best, of limited usefulness for several reasons: usually little or no systematic evidence exists to prove the validity of the generalizations; such generalizations tend to become stereotypes that ignore the many exceptions and variations among real people; such generalizations tend to be couched in value-loaded terms that turn them into criticisms or praise rather than objective description of facts. Nevertheless, a better understanding of the social-psychological setting for this study may be gained by a consideration of some of these generalizations, particularly if one bears in mind the above limitations.

It is often said that Japanese display unusually strong national pride and sensitivity: "they are given both to undue chauvinism for national achievements and to painful embarrassment at what they conceive to be national shortcomings. More positively, they are genuinely concerned with the interests of their whole society, placing that before family interests or the advantage of provinces or classes" (Buck, 1966). This has several implications for the aged. One is the strong sense of duty to the nation that motivates many of the aged to keep working (chapter 5) and to be useful around the house and in the community (chapter 4). On the other hand, since the aged are recognized as an important part of the nation, many Japanese, particularly Japanese officials, seem to consider it a matter of national honor to improve the conditions of the aged. They are very sensitive, for example, to comparative statistics which show that the Japanese aged have lower levels of social security benefits and a relatively small number of institutions for care of the aged.

Concern with politeness and deference toward elders and superiors and "saving face" are other traditional characteristics of the Japanese. Many Americans, whose social usages prescribe more informality, frankness, and directness, have criticized this concern as evasive, hypocritical, and dishonest. It may be that Japanese tend to be more evasive in some situations, but this is usually motivated by a desire to avoid the rudeness of contra-



diction, criticism, or outright refusal. "Polite lies" are used throughout the civilized world to avoid such rudeness and embarrassment. The Japanese probably differ only in the degree to which they resort to such tactics. As for dishonesty, the Japanese are probably more generally honest in the legal sense than Westerners. Most Japanese have a deep respect for the law and personal property. This can be illustrated in many ways: it is still relatively safe for women to walk the streets at night alone (Tokyo has been called the "last safe city in the world"); bicycles are often left unlocked in public places and are considered completely safe if locked with a flimsy lock that would be practically no deterrent in much of the United States; most items left on trains or subways are turned in to the lost-and-found department; despite the flimsy construction of most Japanese doors and windows, there are relatively few house burglaries. In general, crime rates in Japan are a small fraction of those in the United States, e.g., one-fifth as many murders and rapes, one-hundredth as many robberies (Bayley, 1976).

Many observers have pointed out a dominant aesthetic sense in the Japanese temperament: "Universal appreciation and preservation of the natural beauty of their homeland and a love of aesthetically pleasing pastimes (flower viewing, flower arranging, the tea ceremony, for instance) are striking instances of this. In addition, they maintain traditions of fine style in the manufacture of everyday utilitarian objects" (Buck, 1966). Westerners are often impressed with this aesthetic appreciation in Japan. For example, flower arrangements, potted plants, and goldfish tanks appear in places where they would not appear in the Western world: on train platforms, in police stations, tour buses, and even public toilets. This aesthetic appreciation seems to be particularly cultivated by older Japanese. The arts of *bonsai* (growing miniature trees), flower arranging, tea ceremony, gardening, folk dancing, chanting of *yōkyoku* (texts of the classical dramas) and other poetry, writing of *haiku*, and calligraphy, all are frequently reported hobbies of the older Japanese. All these activities usually are highly valued because they contribute to the creation and preservation of beauty.

Another traditional Japanese trait is a more casual and flexible

attitude toward time and scheduling. It has been said that "the Japanese are not tyrannized by the clock, nor is there an emphasis on scheduling of activities" (Smith, 1961, p. 99). It is claimed that this makes older people more accepting of the approaching end of time for them and of their increased leisure. "The older adult is not, then, a prisoner of time, nor does he feel that it is running out for him. He makes no effort to appear younger than he is. The minutes, hours, and days simply pass, filled up with a variety of activities which are performed as the need to do them arises. Time does not drag and it does not threaten; it is there to be used but it does not stretch emptily before the older person" (Smith, 1961, pp. 99f).

On the other hand, the Japanese are usually driven by a stronger work ethic than most Americans. Many Japanese regularly work overtime with no extra pay, and most Japanese work six days and about 47 hours a week (Japan census, 1984). Many Japanese do not even use much of the vacation time to which they are entitled, either because they believe their job requires them to be there or because they enjoy working more than vacationing. This strong work ethic partly accounts for the high employment rate among elder Japanese (chapter 5).

Finally, there are two social characteristics of Japan that make transportation for the aged less of a problem than in most of the United States. The first is that, although the big cities now have big department stores, most daily shopping takes place in small neighborhood grocery stores and specialty shops. Most neighborhoods have their own meat store, fish shop, vegetable and fruit store, canned- and dry-goods store, as well as several other small shops specializing in shoes, flowers, electric appliances, hardware, pottery and utensils, etc. Thus, most aged are within walking distance of shops that can supply most of their daily needs. These small, family-owned and operated shops also provide considerable employment for the aged (chapter 5).

The other fact is that the public transit system in Japan is one of the most elaborate and convenient in the world. For example, one can commute to downtown Tokyo from most of the suburbs in about a half hour on the express trains. Similarly, one can get from any part of the central city of Tokyo to any other part in



about a half hour on the subways. Thus, the need for private automobiles to provide transportation is much less in Japan than in most of the United States. Since many of the aged cannot afford an automobile or may have trouble driving, these simple ecological facts probably make a significant contribution to the better integration of the aged in Japanese society.

#### THE TRADITION OF RESPECT FOR THE AGED

The following chapters present and discuss the modern manifestations of respect for the aged. Here we wish only to sketch the traditional background. There seem to be two main roots: the vertical society and filial piety. The vertical society establishes the right of all aged to general respect from younger persons; filial piety specifies the obligations owed to one's own parents and grandparents.

The theory of Japan's vertical society has been most clearly elaborated by Nakane, and most of the following description has been drawn from her book (1972). Put in its simplest form, this theory states that most Japanese interpersonal relationships are determined by a delicately graded hierarchy or system of vertical relationships. Vertical relationships are those between superior and inferior, such as parent and child, master and servant, teacher and student, senior and junior persons. These are contrasted with horizontal relationships, which are those between equals, such as between colleagues and friends in American society. It is part of the theory that, in Japanese society, even relationships between colleagues and friends become vertical depending on age, sex, and other factors.

Because of the overwhelming ascendancy of this vertical orientation, even a set of individuals sharing identical qualifications tend to create a *difference* among themselves. As this is reinforced, an amazingly delicate and intricate system of *ranking* takes shape.

There are numerous examples of this ranking process. Among lathe operators with the same qualifications there exist differences of rank based on relative age, year of entry

into the company or length of continuous service; among professors at the same college, rank can be assessed by the formal date of appointment; among commissioned officers in the former Japanese army the differences between ranks were very great, and it is said that even among second lieutenants distinct ranking was made on the basis of order of appointment. (Nakane, 1972, p. 25)

As is obvious from these examples, age and seniority are among the most important criteria for these vertical rankings. It is true that age may be superseded by other bases of status. For example, the head of a household, regardless of age, occupies the "highest" seat in the household, and his retired father retreats to a "lower" seat. Nevertheless, there is a residual respect that most older persons traditionally retain in relations with most younger persons. The many forms of deferential behavior in both public and private life that show this respect will be described in chapter 7. It is sufficient to recognize here that seniority is a primary basis for the vertical society in Japan, and that this social structure tends to maintain the relatively high status of older Japanese.

The other root of this traditional respect is filial piety, which, in turn, goes back to both Confucian precepts and the even more ancient ancestor worship. Hearn describes ancestor worship as the "real religion of Japan":

The real religion of Japan, the religion still professed in one form or other, by the entire nation (1900), is that cult which has been the foundation of all civilized religion, and of all civilized society—Ancestor-worship. In the course of thousands of years this original cult has undergone modifications, and has assumed various shapes; but everywhere in Japan its fundamental character remains unchanged. Without including the different Buddhist forms of ancestor-worship, we find three distinct rites of purely Japanese origin, subsequently modified to some degree by Chinese influence and ceremonial. These Japanese forms of the cult are all classed together under the name of "Shinto," which signifies, "The Way of the Gods." . . . The three forms of

the Shinto worship of ancestors are the Domestic Cult, the Communal Cult, and the State Cult;—or, in other words, the worship of family ancestors, the worship of clan or tribal ancestors, and the worship of imperial ancestors. (Hearn, 1955, pp. 21f)

One can question whether ancestor worship was the foundation of all civilized religion, but it seems certain that it was the foundation of Japanese religions. To appreciate the supreme importance of ancestor worship in ancient Japan, one need only consider the implications of the five basic beliefs of this religion:

I. The dead remain in this world,—haunting their tombs, and also their former homes, and sharing invisibly in the life of their living descendants;

II. All the dead became gods, in the sense of acquiring supernatural power; but they retain the characters which distinguish them during life;

III. The happiness of the dead depends upon the respectful service rendered them by the living; and the happiness of the living depends upon the fulfilment of pious duty to the dead; . . .

IV. Every event in the world, good or evil,—fair seasons or plentiful harvests,—flood and famine,—tempest and tidal-wave and earthquake,—is the work of the dead;

V. All human actions, good or bad, are controlled by the dead. (Hearn, 1955, p. 31)

Hearn probably exaggerates the actual beliefs in the power of the ancestral ghosts, but it was generally considered important that the ghosts be kept happy through reverence and nourishment:

But, in spite of their supernatural power, the dead are still dependent upon the living for happiness. Though viewless, save in dreams, they need earthly nourishment and homage,—food and drink, and the reverence of their descendants. Each ghost must rely for such comfort upon its living kindred;—only through the devotion of that kindred can it ever find repose. Each ghost must have shelter,—a fitting

tomb;—each must have offerings. While honorably sheltered and properly nourished the spirit is pleased, and will aid in maintaining the good-fortune of its propitiators. But if refused the sepulchral home, the funeral rites, the offerings of food and fire and drink, the spirit will suffer from hunger and cold and thirst, and, becoming angered, will act malevolently and contrive misfortune for those by whom it has been neglected. (Hearn, 1955, p. 29)

It is but a small step from this ancestor worship to filial piety toward living parents and grandparents. Since reverence and devotion to dead ancestors are of supreme importance, respect and duty toward living parents and grandparents (who will soon become dead ancestors) become the second most important things in life.

*Oyakōkō*, or obligation to parents, was one of two unconditional and absolute duties (the other being *chu*, obligation to the Emperor, the law, and Japan). These two duties were so absolute and unconditional that there was a special word for them, *gimu*, to distinguish them from all lesser duties. *Gimu* were such unlimited obligations that it was said, "One never repays one ten-thousandth of *gimu*" (Benedict, 1946). It is hard for a Westerner to understand the unconditional nature of this filial piety:

Filial piety became in Japan a duty one had to fulfill even if it meant condoning a parent's vice and injustice. It could be abrogated only if it came into conflict with one's obligation to the Emperor, but certainly not when one's parent was unworthy or when he was destroying one's happiness.

In one of their modern movies a mother comes upon some money her married son, a village schoolmaster, has collected from the villagers to redeem a young schoolgirl about to be sold by her parents to a house of prostitution because they are starving in a rural famine. The schoolmaster's mother steals the money from her son although she is not poor; she runs a respectable restaurant of her own. Her son knows that she has taken it but he had to shoulder the blame himself. His wife discovers the truth, leaves a suicide note taking all responsibility for the loss of the money, and

drowns herself and their baby. Publicity follows but the mother's part in the tragedy is not even called in question. The son has fulfilled the law of filial piety and goes off alone to Hokkaido to build his character so that he can strengthen himself for like tests in coming years. He is a virtuous hero. (Benedict, 1946, p. 119)

In this respect, Japanese filial piety goes beyond even the Chinese Confucian precepts. In the Chinese ethic, a parent must be benevolent toward his children in order to claim their devotion. In traditional Japan, one should perform his filial piety regardless of how tyrannical or disagreeable his parents are. Indeed, in ancient Japan "the patriarch of the Japanese family appears to have had . . . powers of life and death over all the members of the household. . . . The family was a despotism" (Hearn, 1955, p. 71).

A classic example of filial piety is the supposedly true story of Taiko Hideyoshi, a famous Japanese ruler during the sixteenth century. When he was nearing sixty he lost both his one little son, whom he loved dearly, and his younger brother. In order to forget his sorrows:

he determined to do something extraordinary which should make a noise in the world. He planned a vast expedition against the neighboring country of Korea, and constructed many strong fighting ships and ordered his array.

But the mother of Hideyoshi, who was then much over eighty years of age, was so disturbed in mind at hearing of her son's great scheme that she fell sick. Then the mighty warrior, most filial of sons, gave up his hope to lead this expedition in person and set his headquarters in Nagoya, whence to overlook affairs. (Harris, 1937)

Thus, filial piety may require even great rulers to change their conduct of national and international affairs in order to defer to the wishes of parents.

Buddhism also teaches respect for elders. The following story illustrates this teaching:

The Buddha said: an elephant, monkey, and ostrich met under a tall tree to establish who was senior to the others, so that he would receive respect and there would be order in the kingdom. The elephant said, "When I was young I walked over this tree and it did not even touch my belly." The monkey said, "When I was young I stood on the ground and picked leaves from the top of this tree." The ostrich said, "When I was young I swallowed a seed and it went through my body and became this tree." So the elephant and monkey agreed that the ostrich must be the senior. The Buddha then said, "I am that ostrich."

The traditional importance of filial piety in Buddhism is also expressed by the proverb: "Filial piety is the source of many good deeds and the beginning of all virtue."

#### SUMMARY

Japan's climate is similar to that of the eastern United States. Japan is more densely populated than the United States but not much more so than Great Britain. Japan is clearly one of the most industrialized nations in the world. Her total gross domestic product is second only to that of the United States; her per capita GDP is now higher than Great Britain's but not yet as high as that of the United States.

She has a lower percentage of people over age sixty-five, but this percentage is increasing faster than in other countries; it is expected to overtake and surpass those of other countries during the beginning of the next century.

The Japanese are relatively homogeneous racially and ethnically, which may facilitate the integration of the aged. Some social-psychological traits relevant to this analysis are strong national pride, concern with politeness and deference toward superiors, a dominant aesthetic sense, a more casual attitude toward time, and a stronger work ethic. Transportation is less of a problem for the aged in Japan because of the many neighborhood shops and the elaborate system of public transportation.

The tradition of respect for the aged has strong roots both in

the vertical social system and in the unconditional duty of filial piety that derives from the fundamental Japanese religion, ancestor worship. Thus, the ecology and economic system of Japan are similar to that of Western industrialized nations, but her social system and culture have distinctive elements that have helped maintain the relatively high status and integration of older Japanese.



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## Health and Medical Care



Before the fox-shrine<sup>1</sup>  
make one wish: fame, fortune, love?  
No, I pray for health.

We begin our analysis with health and medical care because it appears that these are the most frequent concerns of the aged, both in Japan and the rest of the world (Cantril, 1965). Studies at the Duke Center for the Study of Aging and Human Development found health to be the one factor most closely related to life satisfaction (Palmore and Luikart, 1972). Similarly, a recent study of Tokyo elders found that health indicators were the variables most closely associated with morale among both men and women (Yaguchi, 1984). Furthermore, health care and medical care are the areas chosen as most important by a majority of Japanese over sixty-five (Economic Planning Agency, 1981).

Health is also related to the two theories we shall be testing. Health probably affects the status and integration of the aged, and it clearly affects the amount of activity in which they can engage.

1. A fox-shrine (*Inarisan*) is a local shrine to the god of harvests, before which it is customary to throw a coin in a box, clap your hands, or ring a bell to call the attention of the gods, and then pray for something.



## CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISONS

To measure overall health, however, is a difficult problem, regardless of whether survey-interviewer techniques or medical examinations are used. This becomes doubly difficult when cross-cultural comparisons are made because of differences in conceptions of health and illness between cultures. However, the recent international survey of the aged found that the Japanese elders reported about the same levels of health as those in other countries (table 3-1). About nine out of ten elders in all countries reported that they are "healthy" or "not very healthy, but no particular illness."<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the Japanese elders had the lowest proportion saying they are concerned about their poor health (table 3-2). Finally, life expectancy at birth in Japan is now the highest in the world, and life expectancy at age sixty-five is about the same as in other industrial countries (table 3-3). All of this evidence indicates that the health of elders in Japan is about the same as the health of those in other industrial countries.

Suicide rates might be considered an indicator of rates of men-

Table 3-1. Japanese elders report about the same health as others (percentage distributions of persons 60+)

Health	Japan	United States	Great Britain	France
Healthy	57	62	69	44
Not very healthy, but no illness	29	24	18	45
Sometimes ill and must stay in bed	12	11	12	9
Mostly bedbound	2	1	1	1
No answer	1	2	1	1

Source: Office for the Aged, 1981.

2. In the United States this percentage (86) is similar to the percentage who said their health was "good" or "fair" in the National Survey of the Aged (83; Shanas, 1982). This supports the reliability of this indicator.

Table 3-2. Japanese elders have fewer concerns  
(percentage of persons 60+, multiple answers)

Concern	Japan	United States	Great Britain	France
Poor health	21	40	27	45
Uncertain income	11	24	12	8
Making a will	2	6	3	2
Family relationships	3	9	5	4
Relations with opposite sex	0	2	0	0
Nothing to live for	1	7	3	5
Lack of close friends	1	4	5	5
Other	6	8	6	3
No concerns	62	43	54	41

Source: Office for the Aged, 1981.

tal illness or of unhappiness. Suicide rates among older males are now higher in Japan than in the United States, Great Britain, and Sweden, but lower than in France and West Germany (figure 3-1). Suicide rates among older women are still higher in Japan than in any of the other industrial countries. The higher rates among Japanese are the result of the ancient Japanese tradition of using suicide to preserve the family honor, or save face,

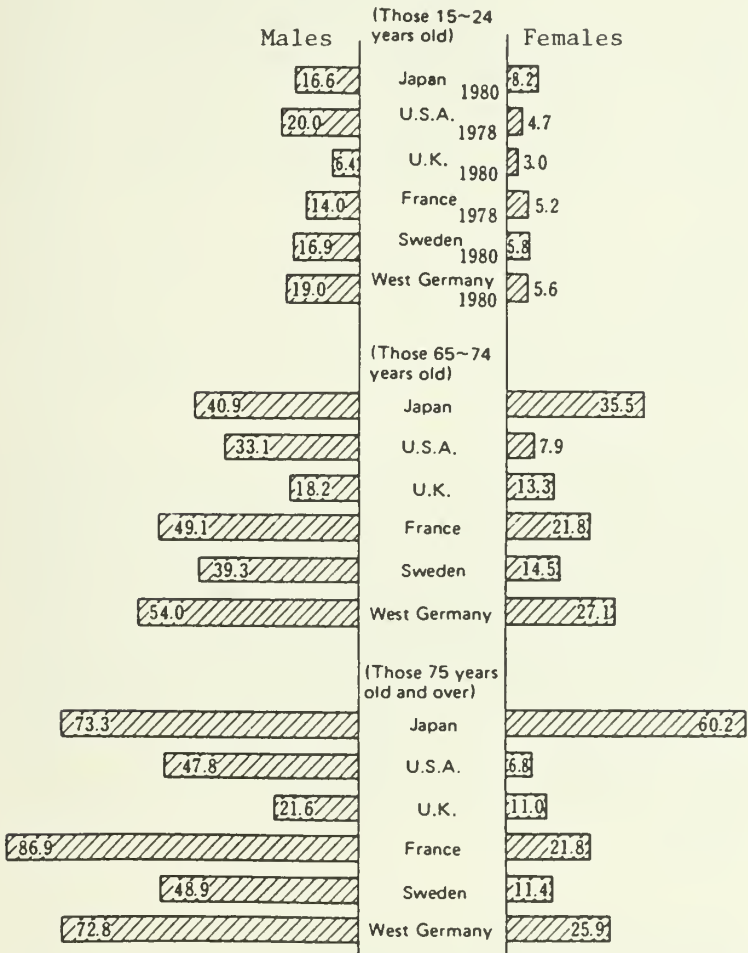
Table 3-3. Life expectancy in Japan and  
other countries, by age and sex (1980)

At birth	Japan	United States	Great Britain	France
Men	73	70	70	70
Women	79	78	76	78
At 65*				
Men	15	14	13	14
Women	18	19	17	18

Source: United Nations, 1983.

\* Number of years expected to remain in an average lifetime.

Figure 3-1. International comparison of suicide rates classified by age (per 100,000 population)



Notes

1. Based on "World Health Statistics" by the World Health Organization (1981 and 1982).
2. "U.K." represents England and Wales.

Table 3-4. More of the younger Japanese elders and of the men report good health (percentage distributions by age and sex)

Age	Healthy	No illness <sup>a</sup>	Sometimes ill	Mostly bedbound	No answer
60-64	64	27	9	1	1
65-69	61	27	11	1	0
70-74	45	34	16	3	2
75-79	51	27	16	4	2
80+	47	36	12	10	0
Sex					
Men	60	25	11	2	2
Women	53	32	12	3	0

Source: Office for the Aged, 1981.

<sup>a</sup> "No illness" stands for "Not very healthy, but no particular illness."

or take revenge on someone, or terminate one's misery, or "solve" a host of other problems. Japanese literature and real life both demonstrate this greater tendency of the traditional Japanese culture to approve or at least to tolerate suicide more than other countries, especially among the old. Other countries also have religious prohibitions against suicide.

However, despite the higher rates among females, suicides are still rare among Japanese elders: only about 1 percent of all deaths among older Japanese. Thus, suicides do not represent the vast majority of elders (the other 99 percent). Also, suicide rates have declined by about 40 percent in Japan since 1955-58, which indicates that the old tradition of suicide described above is fading.

#### FACTORS RELATED TO HEALTH

Cross-tabulations of subjective health rating by age show the expected negative relationship to increasing age (table 3-4). This shows that in Japan, as elsewhere, a growing minority of the aged suffer from poor health as they grow older. But the impres-

sive thing about this cross-tabulation is that even at age eighty and over, more than three-fourths report that they are healthy or have no particular illness. This and table 3-1 show how wrong is the usual stereotype that most persons over seventy are in poor health or are disabled. Why does this stereotype persist despite clear evidence to the contrary? Shanas and associates suggest two reasons: "We only notice old people when they are ill and enfeebled," and, until recently, most of the studies of aging have been done on the sick and institutionalized (1968, p. 18).

The second part of table 3-4 shows that men claim good health more often than women. This seems to be a universal tendency at all age levels in all modern societies studied. Yet, since women at each age level have less mortality than men, it seems unlikely that women are actually sicker than men. The most probable explanation is that in male-dominated societies men are expected to be stronger and more robust than women, and therefore men resist admitting illness more than women.

Are cities with their pollution and crowding detrimental to the health of the aged? A study comparing Tokyo with other cities and rural areas failed to show any clear evidence for this theory (Prime Minister's Office, 1973). In fact, Tokyo had fewer elders reporting poor health than other areas. It seems unlikely that Tokyo is really a more healthy environment than the less densely populated areas. Perhaps there is a selective factor operating so that fewer of the unhealthy aged migrate to or stay in Tokyo.

#### MEDICAL CARE

Obtaining and paying for adequate medical care is a major problem for many older Americans. Despite the coverage of most older Americans by Medicare, this program in fact covers less than half the actual medical costs of the aged. In contrast, most older Japanese can now get free, or at little cost, most of their medical care. Since the beginning of 1973 most Japanese

over seventy, and the bed-bound over sixty-five, get all medical care (including physician-prescribed medicines) free. There are some income restrictions so that wealthy aged do not get this free care. Some cities, such as Tokyo, extend this free medical care down to age sixty-five. The younger aged not covered by this free medical care program are covered by one of the other medical insurance programs. Under the Employees' Health Insurance programs, employees receive 90 percent of their medical and dental care, including office and home visits, drugs, therapy, prosthetics, surgery, hospitalization, out-patient care, nursing, and transportation. Dependents of the employee, however, must pay 30 percent of the cost of the service up to a ceiling of about \$200 per month. Under the National Health Insurance program that covers everybody else, the extent of the medical care is the same, and the program pays 70 percent of the cost up to the ceiling, and all costs over the ceiling. Thus, the financial barriers to medical care in Japan are much less formidable than in the United States.

But there is always the barrier of the time and effort required to get even free medical care. How many of the sick older Japanese actually get medical care? Estimates from the national "One Day Patient Survey" indicate that almost all persons aged 75 or more and about 90 percent of those 65-74 were receiving some kind of medical care (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 1984a). Furthermore, half of all bedfast elders are now cared for in hospitals or long-term care institutions (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 1981).

Another special provision for the health of the aged is the program of free annual health examinations for all persons over forty. These are comprehensive screening examinations followed up by more detailed diagnosis and individual counseling when needed. Although these are available to all over forty, only about one-fourth actually get them. Presumably, most of the remainder either had another recent examination or believed they were in such good health that they did not need an examination.

What do the elders do to maintain their health? One-quarter reported that they are careful to eat a good diet, one-fifth reported that they are careful to get plenty of sleep, one-fifth said

that they engaged in sports or exercise regularly, and one-fifth go for walks (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 1977).

#### TRENDS

Is the health of Japanese elders improving? We do not have accurate statistics over time to conclusively answer this question, but there are several pieces of evidence which suggest that the answer is "yes."

First, life expectancy in Japan at birth and at age sixty-five has increased substantially since 1960 (by about eight years at birth and by three years at age sixty-five). It might be argued that this increase in longevity results in the survival of more incapacitated very old people. However, in the United States where a similar increase in longevity has occurred, data from the National Health Interview Survey show that the health of the aged there has steadily improved since 1960 (Palmore, 1985). Apparently increases in longevity tend to result from improvements in health among the aged.

Second, Japanese elders are now enjoying more and better medical care. Free medical care for them became available in 1973, and of course medical science and treatment have generally been improving over time. This should result in improved health.

Third, the health of Japanese elders as a group is probably improving because healthier cohorts are moving into the old age category. It is clear that the recent younger cohorts of Japanese are healthier and taller than the earlier cohorts because of improvements in diet, sanitation, and medical care. For example, between 1958 and 1978 the average height of Japanese fourteen year olds increased by 3.5 inches (Christopher, 1983).

Consumption of protein and dairy products has increased so that the amount of protein and calcium in the Japanese diet is now roughly comparable to that of Americans (which makes the Japanese diet nutritionally better balanced because it has less cholesterol and fats). This improved diet not only contributes to healthier and taller younger cohorts, but probably also contributes to better health among the elders as well. Actually, it is impres-



sive that the health of the current generation of elders is already as good as that of elders in other countries, when one considers their poor childhood nutrition and the ravages of war they suffered during their earlier adult years.

However, in an attempt to restrain rising medical care expenditures, an "Old-Age Health Act" was enacted in 1983. This act had several new features: (1) nominal fees of about \$1.35 per day for hospitalization and about \$1.80 per month for outpatient treatment; (2) a shift of 70 percent of the expenses of the act from the central and local governments to the various health insurance systems; (3) provision of coverage for visiting nurse care and day care to promote home care rather than hospital or institutional care; and (4) health education for persons forty and over.

#### SUMMARY

The majority of Japanese elders choose health and medical care as the most important area of their life. Surveys and life expectancies show that the health of older Japanese is similar to that of elders in other industrial countries. Higher suicide rates were discounted as being primarily due to cultural differences rather than differences in health. Subjective reports of poor health increase with age, but even among those over eighty, more than three-fourths report good health or no particular illness.

Most older Japanese can get free, or at little cost, most medical care. The most frequently reported ways of maintaining health were eating a good diet, getting plenty of sleep, walking, and exercising.

There are various indications that the health of Japanese elders is improving with improved medical care and nutrition.



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## The Family and Living Arrangements



When hair is snow-white  
what can warm the heart? Only  
family and friends.

Next to health, older Japanese consider family relationships to be the most important thing for life satisfaction. The survey in which older Japanese were asked what are the two most important things for future life satisfaction found that the second choice was most often: "Family respect and care" (Prime Minister's Office, 1973).

### JOINT HOUSEHOLDS

The basic fact that underlies typical family relations of older Japanese and that makes these relations markedly different from those of other industrial countries is the fact that seven out of ten Japanese elders live with their children (table 4-1). This is in contrast with only 13 percent in the United States, 8 percent in Great Britain, and 21 percent in France. Furthermore, the typical household of the older Japanese contains not only his or her son, but grandchildren as well. Over half of those living with children also have grandchildren in their home. In contrast, only 4 percent of U.S. elders and 1 percent of British elders live with their grandchildren.

Even more of the Japanese elders without a spouse present live with their children: about eight out of ten (Nasu, 1973). Of

Table 4-1. Most Japanese elders live with adult child  
(percentage of persons 60+, multiple answers)

Persons in household	Japan	United States	Great Britain	France
Spouse	65	47	49	56
Married son	41	1	1	4
Married daughter	9	3	2	6
Unmarried son/daughter	19	9	5	11
Spouse of son/daughter	34	2	1	4
Grandchild	41	4	1	6
Other relative	3	4	4	5
Nonrelative	1	2	1	1
Live alone	6	41	42	30
Live with son/daughter <sup>a</sup>	69	13	8	21

<sup>a</sup> Sum of those living with married son, married daughter, or unmarried son/daughter.

Source: Office for the Aged, 1981.

those without a spouse who do not live with children, most live with other relatives and some live with nonrelatives, so it is rare to find an older Japanese living alone (only 6 percent). In the other countries mentioned above 30 to 40 percent live alone.

However, some people discount this high proportion living with their children by assuming that the proportion is rapidly declining, that the majority of younger couples want to live separately from their parents, and that only economic necessity or crowded housing forces them to live with their parents. Each of these assumptions is demonstrably false.

In 1960 the proportion of Japanese over sixty-five living with their children was 87 percent, and by 1980 this had declined to 69 percent (Office for the Aged, 1960 and 1980). This is a decline of less than 1 percent per year. At that rate a majority of the elders will still be living with their children at the beginning of the next century. And there is evidence that this decline may slow or stop before the next century (see the discussion of Trends later in this chapter).

As for preference in living arrangements, six out of ten Japa-

nese elders prefer to live with their children, in contrast to less than one out of ten in the United States and Great Britain (table 4-2). Similarly, about six out of ten younger Japanese, in both cities and rural areas, wish to live with their children or relatives when they retire (Office for the Aged, 1977). This proportion increases to over eight out of ten of both younger and older people when the question is about widowed or sick parents (Office for the Aged, 1981). The only difference is in regard to whether it is better for healthy parents to live with married children: six out of ten younger people agree, while seven out of ten older people agree. Thus, there is little or no difference between generations on this basic question of preference in living arrangements.

In a recent comparison of women in Tokyo and Philadelphia, it was found that, as expected, the Tokyo women were more favorable than the Philadelphia women toward adult children living with or close to their parents, toward working women leaving their jobs to care for their mothers, and toward primary reliance on children rather than government programs. However, the Tokyo women were somewhat less favorable toward some other dimensions of filial responsibility (Tojo et al., 1983). The reasons for this latter result are unclear but may be due to cultural differences in the connotations of the terms used in the questions.

Table 4-2. More Japanese elders prefer to live with their children (percentage of persons 60+)

Relationship preferred	Japan	United States	Great Britain	France
Live with children	59	7	6	12
Meet occasionally for meals and a chat	30	66	40	82
Meet occasionally for a chat	7	25	44	5
No contact	1	1	1	1
No answer	2	3	9	1

Source: Office for the Aged, 1981.

As for the assumption that most joint households are caused by economic necessity, the evidence is again to the contrary. For example, a survey in the Tokyo metropolitan area found that most housewives in apartments (aged 30-59) who lived with parents favored a continuation of living in joint households. Only 3 percent wanted to live separately (Japan Housing Foundation, 1973). For another example, in a survey of parents over age fifty, those who said they wanted to live with their children upon retirement were asked whether they would want to live together or separately if they had sufficient money and personal care to live in separate homes. Ninety-one percent of those responding said they would still prefer to live together with their children (Prime Minister's Office, 1973). The same survey also found that 95 percent of those actually living with their children wanted to continue living with their children, and a third of those living separately would rather live with their children. Finally, only 20 percent gave "financial aid" as a reason for wanting to live with their children, while the rest gave reasons such as: "It is natural to live with your children"; "Companionship with children"; and "Get care from children" (table 4-3). There probably is some bias in these answers toward the socially expected type, but it appears that the joint household is not only

Table 4-3. Few Japanese elders want to live with children because of financial aid (multiple answers)

Reasons for wanting to live with children	Percentage giving reason
Get care from children	38
It is natural to live with children	31
Companionship with children	30
Financial aid from children	20
Enjoyment of caring for children and grandchildren	9
Convenience	8
Children want me to live with them	6
Other reasons	2

Source: National Life Center, 1972.

the typical living arrangement but is usually preferred for reasons other than economic necessity.

It is also significant that of those who said they wanted to live separately, most still wanted to live within the same compound or at least within walking distance of their children, and only one-third wanted to live beyond walking distance of their children.

Sometimes it is argued that the joint households are forced by a housing shortage. It is true that until recently Japan did have a severe housing shortage. Even now, the cost of housing is much higher in Japan than elsewhere. However, due to housing construction rates that have been double those of the United States, the number of vacant dwellings has reached the level of the Western countries (Tanaka, 1982). This indicates that Japan no longer has a housing shortage greater than that of other countries. Furthermore, the rate of joint households is lower in urban areas, while the housing shortage is greater in those areas. Thus, if anything, the housing shortage tends to prevent joint households rather than force them.

The difference in living arrangements between Japan and other countries is partly explained by differences in demographic characteristics such as marital status and having surviving children. The proportion of older Japanese with a spouse present is somewhat higher than that of other countries, and there are somewhat more of the older Japanese with surviving children (96 percent in Japan compared to 83 percent in the United States). This is probably due to a higher marriage rate in Japan (99 percent have been married) and to the practice of childless couples adopting a child. However, these demographic differences could account for only a small part of the massive differences between Japan and other countries in the proportion of elders living with children.

Two other differences in the pattern of joint households between Japan and the comparison countries are worth noting. While the joint households in the comparison countries tend to consist of an older person or couple with an unmarried child ("nuclear" families), three-fourths of the joint households in Japan are with married children ("stem" families) (table 4-1).

Indeed, in the United States and Great Britain less than 4 percent of the aged live with married children. This shows that joint households in the comparison countries tend to be confined to those few cases in which either the child or the parent is spouseless, whereas in Japan joint households are the dominant pattern for married and unmarried parents and children alike.

The other difference is that in the comparison countries joint households tend to be with the daughter, while in Japan the opposite is true: there are about four times as many joint households with the son as with the daughter (table 4-1). In Japan the parent-son tie is stronger because of the tradition of filial responsibility in which it is the son's responsibility to care for his parents, while the daughter tends to cut her ties with her own parents upon marriage and transfers her loyalties to her husband's family and parents. This tradition of parents living with the son's family often creates the well-known mother-in-law versus daughter-in-law conflicts.

Another note on joint households in Japan: the typical pattern is for the parents to live continuously with their child (usually the oldest son), rather than to live separately during middle age and move back in with the child during their last years. In Tokyo, for example, nine out of ten elders in joint households had lived continuously with their children (Nasu, 1973). In such households it would be more accurate to say that the children are living with their parents rather than vice versa.

How crowded are these joint households? Three-fourths of all Japanese over age sixty have at least their own bedroom (*Welfare Journal*, 1971). This proportion drops to about two-thirds in households with over four members (joint households). This seems to indicate that there is little more crowding in the joint households than in separate households.

Many of the older Japanese who are listed as sharing a joint household actually live in a separate part of the house or apartment, with separate cooking facilities, and may eat some of their meals separately from the rest of the family. Especially in rural Japan, it is sometimes the custom for the older parents to retire to a separate little house behind the main house. These practices

of semi-separate facilities within a joint household probably reduce tensions that might otherwise develop.

Finally, how satisfied are the elders with their living arrangements? Are there differences in life satisfaction between those living with children and those living separately? Surveys show that those living with children tend to be more satisfied than those living separately, and those without children are the least satisfied (table 4-4). But it should be noted that about one-tenth of those living with children reported feeling some dissatisfaction. This shows that joint households do sometimes result in difficulties.

#### FUNCTIONS OF ELDERS IN JOINT HOUSEHOLDS

Why do so many of the older Japanese live with their children? We have discussed the tradition of filial responsibility and the general reasons given in surveys (table 4-3), but these reasons do not sufficiently recognize the important functions that most aged perform in their joint households. For example, there is the function of the *rusuban*, or caretaker (literally "watcher during absences"). Because most Japanese houses have sliding doors and are generally less burglar-proof than Western houses,

Table 4-4. Elders living with children are the most satisfied (percentage distributions of Japanese 60+)

Satisfaction	Without children	With children	
		Living alone	Living together
Fully satisfied	21	25	33
Fairly satisfied	40	51	52
Somewhat dissatisfied	22	13	9
Totally dissatisfied	8	5	2
No answer	9	5	5
Total	100	100	100

Source: Prime Minister's Office, 1974.



it is usually considered necessary to have someone stay in the house most of the time as a caretaker to prevent burglary. This is an easy function for the aged, and one that most aged in joint households appear to perform frequently.

The grandmother appears to perform more important functions than the grandfather. Typically, she prepares or supervises preparation of meals, supervises younger children, does small gardening, and helps with the laundry. "During the busy season everyone capable of active labour is indispensable. The grandmother, on the other hand, stays at home doing the housework or tending the babies, and sometimes acts as a liaison officer to the family" (Koyama, 1961, p. 93).

In addition, grandmother is usually the perpetuator of religious affairs. It is she who makes offerings to the god of the kitchen and others, and visits the shrines, making pilgrimage during the ceremonial days. Especially in rural areas, the grandmother often cares for the children to free the mothers for field work. "Criticism has often been directed at the fact that the grandmothers and not the mothers of the schoolchildren are present at the meetings of the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) in rural communities. From the standpoint of the farm families, the attendance of the grandmothers is taken for granted because the mothers are needed in the fields for doing the farm work" (Koyama, 1961, p. 93). In urban areas also, the grandparents free the mother for outside work by caring for the children. In general, Japanese elders care for their grandchildren more than elders in other countries (table 4-5).

Table 4-5. More Japanese elders care for grandchildren  
(percentage distributions of persons 60+)

Frequency of care	Japan	United States	Great Britain	France
Often	31	19	19	31
Rarely	18	15	9	11
Never	27	31	25	20
No grandchildren/no answer	24	35	47	38

Source: Office for the Aged, 1981.



Grandfathers appear to be somewhat less active, although there is considerable variability in this regard. "(The retired grandfather) position is assumed gradually and has some variability. Retirement from a full work load and full authority to a routine of light tasks and advisor functions marks the step-by-step assumption of the role. . . . Skilled handicrafts, menial tasks, and some baby-tending become his main economic functions" (Silberman, 1962, p. 145).

An especially important function of both grandmothers and grandfathers is that of affectional support for the grandchildren. Grandparents appear to have less important functions than parents in the areas of task performance, discipline, and problem solving, but in the area of comfort and affectional support the grandparents are usually most important. In many cases, one child may be assigned to the grandmother and another to the grandfather. They bathe and sleep together and help each other (Vogel, 1967, p. 224).

A survey of persons over sixty living with their children found that help in the family business was the most frequent main role in the household for men (27 percent), with gardening being second (19 percent). Over one-third of the women specified housework as their main role, with help in family business and care of grandchildren running a close second and third place (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 1972). Only 11 percent said they had no special role in the household. Another survey found that in a majority of households with a woman aged 60-69, the older woman had *primary* responsibility for housekeeping (National Life Center, 1972).

One of the most important functions of Japanese elders is that of senior advisor on family problems. More than two-thirds of Japanese over sixty report that they are consulted on family problems, and this proportion is even higher among the men and among the employed (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 1972). In earlier times the decision of the elder on all matters was final and usually accepted by all family members. These days the authority of the elders appears to be quite variable, depending on which matter is in question (the elders have more authority in "traditional" matters and less in regard to "modern"

matters such as those involving technology), how much power and competence the elder retains, etc. Nevertheless, most elders are at least consulted on some family problems.

In a recent survey those who thought one should live with their children in old age were asked why. The most frequently given reasons were "to share in the housekeeping and child care," "to hand down customs and traditions to one's children," and "to make use of one's experience and knowledge" (Prime Minister's Office, 1982).

In light of all these functions it is understandable why most of the elders living with their children are considered valuable members of the household rather than merely financial burdens.

#### SEPARATE HOUSEHOLDS

What of the elders living in separate households? How much are they integrated into the family? One measure is the proximity of the nearest child's household. Those who live closer generally see more of their families than those who live farther away (Okamura, 1984). Nearly half of those in separate households live within thirty minutes' travel of their nearest child (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 1973). Only 12 percent of all aged parents (including both separate and joint households) live more than a half hour away from children. In other countries about one-quarter of elders live more than a half hour away. It is therefore at least possible for most aged in all countries to see their children on an almost daily basis.

Indeed, 85 percent of the older Japanese parents did see their children on a daily or almost daily basis (table 4-6). In the comparison countries fewer of the aged lived with their children, but more of those in separate households saw their children frequently, so that about two-thirds of the total saw their children daily or almost daily. Less than 10 percent of the elders in any country saw their children less than once a month.

With such frequent contact, we might expect that few of the elders often feel lonely, despite widespread speculation to the contrary. In fact, less than 15 percent of the elders in any coun-

Table 4-6. Most aged see their children at least every month (percentage distribution)

Time frequency	Japan	United States	Great Britain	Denmark
Every day or every other day	85	63	69	62
Every week	5	18	17	22
Every month	7	7	8	10
Less than every month	4	10	6	6
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: Japan—Ministry of Health and Welfare, 1973. Other countries—Shanas and associates, 1968. ("Every day" includes those who live in joint households with a child.)

try said they often feel lonely, and this proportion was only 6 percent in Japan (table 4-7).

A survey in Tokyo found that older women living separately from their children received even more visits, support, allowance, help, and gifts from their children than those living in joint households (Okamura, 1984). Joint ceremonial activity (at weddings, funerals, etc.) as well as informal and emotional contacts

Table 4-7. Fewer Japanese elders feel lonely (percentage distribution of persons 60+)

Frequency of loneliness	Japan	United States	Great Britain	France
Often	6	12	11	15
Sometimes	26	26	23	25
Seldom	33	31	11	18
Never	33	30	55	41
No answer	2	1	0	0

Source: Office for the Aged, 1981.

with their children are frequent for the elders in both separate and joint households.

Also, almost all the Japanese elders said there was someone to care for them during illnesses or other emergencies (Prime Minister's Office, 1973), although this proportion drops to 69 percent among elders in Tokyo not living with a child (Tokyo Metropolitan Government, 1971). In the majority of cases it is a child or other relative who would care for them.

Similarly, a recent survey of middle-aged persons found that 80 percent said they or their spouse would care for their parents if they became bedridden, and another 10 percent said their parents' spouse would care for the parent (Office for the Aged, 1982).

Also, 95 percent of Japanese elders have someone they can talk to about their worries, and most of these persons are either the spouse or the son (table 4-8). In other countries sons are less often the confidant, while nonrelatives are more often confidants. This again shows the greater importance in Japan of the parent-son bond and of family support in general.

Table 4-8. Most Japanese elders have a spouse or son for confidant (percentage of persons 60+, multiple answers)

Confidant	Japan	United States	Great Britain	France
Spouse	43	40	41	42
Sibling	13	16	13	5
Son	43	28	26	25
Daughter	28	32	32	33
Son-in-law/Daughter-in-law	14	11	13	8
Other relative	7	11	12	8
Friend	8	23	19	10
Minister, priest, etc.	1	14	9	2
Other nonrelative	2	7	6	1
No one	5	8	5	9
No answer	9	2	1	1

Source: Office for the Aged, 1981.

## INSTITUTIONS

Another striking difference between Japan and other industrial countries is how few of the elders in Japan are living in institutions. While Western countries have 5 to 9 percent of their elders in long-term care institutions, Japan has only 1.6 percent. (Another 1 or 2 percent of Japanese elders are long-stay patients in general hospitals, but this is true of the other countries as well.)

The question is whether this is the result of low demand or because of a shortage in facilities. In other words, do Japanese believe they have enough long-term care facilities or do they want to increase these facilities? Opinion is divided on this issue. It is clear that almost no Japanese elders prefer to be cared for in an institution (when they need care) in contrast to the other countries where 4 to 13 percent prefer care in institutions (table 4-9).

Most government officials apparently believe that a small increase in institutions would be sufficient. However, most social workers and gerontologists appear to believe that there is a

Table 4-9. Most Japanese elders prefer spouse or child to care for them (percentage distribution of persons 60+)

Preferred care-giver	Japan	United States	Great Britain	France
Spouse	39	37	32	25
Son	16	8	4	9
Daughter	14	21	16	18
Daughter-in-law	19	1	2	1
Son-in-law	0	0	0	0
Other relative	1	7	6	3
Home helper or nurse	0	9	13	8
Staff of old people's home	0	4	10	13
Other nonrelative	3	6	6	4
No answer	7	7	13	18

Source: Office for the Aged, 1981.

serious shortage of institutions, especially of nursing homes, and want to increase them substantially—but not to the same level as Western countries. They point to the fact that even seriously impaired elders receiving poor personal care at home often have to wait a long time to be admitted in most urban institutions. Japan is making a serious effort to improve this situation. In the last fifteen years the number of long-term care beds for the elderly was more than doubled; but because of the rapid increase in the number of elders, the percentage of the elders in institutions was increased by only half (from 1.0 to 1.6). The government has also instituted extra tax deductions to households with impaired aged and has increased the number of home helpers to reduce the demand for institutionalization.

The evidence from surveys is also conflicting. Two surveys found that 3 percent of those over sixty-five said they wanted to get into an institution for the aged “now” (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 1970 and 1972), but another survey found only 1 percent wanted to enter immediately (Prime Minister’s Office, 1973).

It seems likely that for the foreseeable future the strong tradition of keeping aged parents in joint households, even when they become bedfast, will continue to keep the proportion of Japanese aged in institutions at levels far below those of other industrialized countries.

## TRENDS

The most important trend is the slow decline in proportions of elders living with children.<sup>1</sup> We have seen that this decline has been less than 1 percent per year. At that rate, as we mentioned, a majority of elders will still be living with their children at the turn of the century.

Six out of ten Japanese at all ages prefer living with their children when they become old (Office for the Aged, 1977). Furthermore, these preferences have not changed noticeably in the past

1. There has been a similar decline in the United States (Shanas, 1982).

ten years. Actually, a recent survey of three female generations in Tokyo found that the youngest generation was even more favorable toward joint households than the middle-aged generation (Nishishita, 1984). However, it is difficult to predict future behavior from present attitudes.

Some have argued that many elders live with their children because of a housing shortage and that, as the housing shortage eases, joint households will diminish. However, we have seen that there is no longer a greater housing shortage in Japan than in Western countries and that urban areas with the worst housing shortages have the lowest proportion of joint households. Therefore, improvement in housing supply could actually increase the proportion of joint households.

As for the functions performed by elders in the joint households, these should become more important as more women, and especially mothers of small children, take jobs outside the home. Every year more and more Japanese women hold jobs; about half of all females over fifteen now work at paid employment (Christopher, 1983). This makes it more frequently necessary to have live-in grandparents to help with child care, housekeeping, house watching, shopping, etc.

We have seen how the proportion of Japanese elders institutionalized has increased from 1.0 percent to 1.6 percent in the past fifteen years. It seems likely that this slow increase will continue because of increasing demand for more institutional beds. However, the strong tradition of keeping aged parents in joint households, combined with government programs to keep the aged in the community as long as possible, will probably keep the proportion institutionalized much lower than in other industrial countries. For example, at the present rate of increase there will be only 2 percent of elders institutionalized at the turn of the century. Furthermore, a recent survey found that the middle-aged and younger generations were even more favorable than the older generation toward joint households and filial care of elders (Tojo et al., 1983). This indicates that the present pattern of care for elders in the home is not likely to decline much.



## SUMMARY

The aged in Japan are more integrated into their families than the aged in the comparison industrial countries. About seven in ten actually live with their children, and this is true of all age groups and most areas. Whereas about half the single aged in the comparison countries live by themselves, in Japan there are very few single aged living by themselves. This is primarily due to preference rather than the housing shortage, financial necessity, or demographic differences. The aged perform many valued functions in the household. Living with children also seems to contribute to greater life satisfaction.

Even among those who live in separate households, about half live within thirty minutes' travel of their nearest child, and about half see their children at least every week. Fewer of the aged in Japan say they are often lonely, and this is not likely to change much in the future. While there has been a slow decline in the proportion living with their children, the data suggest that the majority will continue to live with their children in the future. The proportion institutionalized may increase slightly, but it is likely to remain substantially below the proportions in other countries.

Thus, the theory that industrialization causes low integration of the aged seems to have little relevance to the integration of older Japanese with their families. On the contrary, the theory that cultural traditions have important effects, independent of economic factors, is here demonstrated. The Japanese tradition of filial responsibility and respect for the aged seems to be the main force maintaining integration of the aged in their families despite the counterforces of industrialization.



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## Work and Retirement



Will these gnarled hands  
keep pushing, pulling, pounding,  
or fold and retire?

### INDUSTRIALIZATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Perhaps the major decision faced by most elders in industrial countries is whether to work or not to work. The results of this decision affect not only their income but their entire life-style as well.

Again, Japan is fundamentally different from other industrial countries. The majority of Japanese elders who were ever employed continue to work at paid employment, compared to only one-quarter in the United States and less than one-tenth in Great Britain and France (table 5-1). Also, the labor force participation rate is relatively high in all parts of the country, even though it is about 5 percent higher in rural than urban areas (Prime Minister's Office, 1973).

This is another major piece of evidence that the integration of the aged can remain high despite industrialization. This high rate of continued employment seems to have resulted from two major types of factors: economic and cultural. The economic factors include the necessity to work because of inadequate retirement income, the lower rate of unemployment in the Japanese economy, and the greater opportunities for employment, especially part-time employment, in such jobs as farming, shopkeep-

→ to Social Security Differences

Table 5-1. More of the Japanese continue to be employed  
(percentages of ever employed who are now employed)

Age	Japan	United States	Great Britain	France
60-64	77	55	24	17
65-69	55	26	7	8
70-74	39	18	6	2
75-79	18	10	3	2
80+	18	9	1	2
Total	55	27	9	7

Source: Office for the Aged, 1981.

ing, and other family businesses. The cultural factors include two traditions: (1) every able-bodied person should work as much and as long as possible, and (2) seniority and respect for elder workers. The tradition of working as much and as long as possible is part of the strong work ethic described in chapter 2. Those elders who continue to work are generally more respected than those who do not. The tradition of seniority and respect for older workers appears to reduce discrimination against the aged in employment. Two-thirds of managers said they thought most people can work satisfactorily after age sixty if a little allowance is made for them in terms of working conditions such as amount of work, work hours, or work environments (Ministry of Labor, 1981).

The greater employment opportunities for older workers in Japan are also shown by their lower unemployment rate, which is about 1 percentage point below that of the United States at ages 55-64 and 65+ (Prime Minister's Office, 1982, and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1983).

Seniority and respect for elders are also reflected in the fact that most Japanese businesses, the legislatures, educational and religious organizations, etc. are largely controlled by elders (Christopher, 1983). Although the majority of older workers must "retire" to lesser jobs by age sixty or sixty-five, the elite at the top levels of business, politics, education, and religion usu-

ally do not retire until they are very old and physically or mentally incapacitated. In fact, some younger workers complain about the extent to which these major institutions are dominated by elders.

The tradition of continuing to work in old age may appear to be contradicted by the fact that the customary "retirement age" in most large firms is between fifty-five and sixty. But in Japan "retirement" at age fifty-five or sixty usually means simply switching to another job in the same company or in another company, or to part-time work, or to self-employment. Ninety-two percent of men aged 55-59 continue to work, and 81 percent of those 60-64 also continue to work (Prime Minister's Office, 1975). In the United States retirement usually means the end of employment; in Japan it usually means reduced work and responsibility, but continued employment.

#### THE EMPLOYED

Who are the employed aged? What do they do? How much do they work? Why do they work? These are all questions relevant to the status and integration of the aged into the labor force.

In Japan as elsewhere the proportions of those ever employed who continue to work decline steadily with age (table 5-1). But even at ages 70-74, four out of ten Japanese continue to work compared to less than two in ten in the comparison countries. At all ages above sixty-five, more than twice as many Japanese workers continue to be employed.

As for what they do, about two-thirds of older Japanese workers are self-employed or are managers (table 5-2). This contrasts to the United States where only one-third are self-employed or managers. As for occupation, one-third are farmers, lumbermen, or fishermen (Japan Census, 1980) in contrast to the United States where about one-tenth are in these occupations (U.S. Census, 1983). Also, twice as many older Japanese as older Americans work in sales occupations. Thus, there are many more opportunities in Japan for older persons to remain or become self-employed farmers or shopkeepers than in the United States. In rural Japan these older farmers are much in evidence, toiling in

Table 5-2. More of the Japanese elders are self-employed and work full-time (percentages of employed persons 60+)

Type of Employment	Japan	United States	Great Britain	France
Self-employed	50	23	13	34
Manager	12	11	5	3
Full-time white collar	10	28	9	2
Full-time blue collar	15	9	22	11
Part-time	13	29	51	48

Source: Office for the Aged, 1981.

their rice paddies or vegetable gardens with straw hats to protect them from the sun and weather. The older shopkeeper tending his or her little specialty shop is also a common sight. There are also many traditional occupations in which older persons are often at the peak of their careers. "Painters, writers, actors, and certain highly skilled artisans often do not achieve full competence until their middle or late fifties and many pursue active professional lives far into the seventies and even eighties. Great respect is accorded these people, even by the very young in the same profession" (Smith, 1961). As a symbol of this respect, several outstanding elder artisans, actors, writers, etc., are designated as "living national treasures" each year by the national government and are given a pension to support their continued occupation.

As for how much they work, some elders retire to part-time jobs and some increase their hours of work to make up for reduced earnings, but the overall average number of hours worked is about the same for wage and salary workers over age sixty as for other workers: about forty-four hours per week (Ministry of Labor, 1984). Many self-employed workers work even longer hours, especially on farms and in family shops. Japanese older workers put in more hours than older workers in other industrialized countries. In the United States, Great Britain, and Denmark, the average number of hours for blue-collar workers over age sixty-five is less than forty per week (Shanas and associates,

1968). Thus, not only do more of the older Japanese continue to work, but they work longer hours as well.

Why do the older Japanese continue to work so much? How many continue to work because of financial necessity, and how many work for other reasons? It is difficult to get valid and reliable data on these questions because many people work for a mixture of motivations, and the stated reasons are often influenced by rationalization and the social acceptability of various answers. Nevertheless, the findings of several surveys agree that only a minority of older workers continue to work primarily because of financial necessity. For example, a recent international survey found income to be the primary reason given by four out of ten older workers in Japan, while half gave enjoyment or health as the reason (table 5-3). In the United States more gave enjoyment and fewer gave health as the reason. Earlier surveys found "duty" to be the most frequent primary reason (41 percent) given in Japan, while financial necessity was given by 36 percent (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 1970).

Here again is the problem of bias toward socially desirable answers. Perhaps a more objective way to get at this is to ask whether the earnings are used for primary support or for secondary support, luxuries, and such extras. The answers to this question indicated that less than half work to provide primary

Table 5-3. Most Japanese elders continue working because of income or health (percentage distributions of workers 60+ who want to continue working)

Reasons	Japan	United States	Great Britain	France
Need the income	39	35	27	22
Enjoyment of work	12	44	41	41
Keep co-worker friends	8	3	6	8
Maintain health	38	14	18	20
Other	3	3	7	6
No answer	1	0	2	2

Source: Office for the Aged, 1981.

support, while the majority provide secondary support, luxuries, or other things (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 1972).

A survey in which workers of all ages were asked what was their attitude toward work after retirement found about half who said that work after retirement is "normal" and only 7 percent who said they would work only if it was financially necessary (National Life Center, 1972). A more recent survey of workers found that 43 percent said they want to continue to work as long as possible rather than retire from work, and another 14 percent said they want to work until sixty-five or later (Prime Minister's Office, 1982). This is in marked contrast to the United States where the majority of workers want to retire as soon as possible, and about two-thirds take early retirement (before age sixty-five). Similarly, 95 percent of older Japanese workers want to continue working, while only about 80 percent of older workers in the other industrial countries do (Office for the Aged, 1981).

In summary, the work ethic appears to be stronger among older Japanese than among elders in other industrial countries, and the majority of Japanese elders continue to work for reasons other than economic necessity.

#### SOME ILLUSTRATIONS

There are many Japanese stories which illustrate the expectations that older persons should continue to work as long as possible. One of the most famous classic stories is that of an old couple in the "Slit-tongue Sparrow." The old man is rewarded for befriending a lost sparrow and for his lack of greed; the old woman is punished for cutting the tongue of the sparrow and for her greed. But the point for present purposes is that, although both were quite old, the man continued working as a woodcutter and the woman continued to do all the housework, as is normal for most older Japanese.

A more recent story is that of "Old Gen" whose attempt to adopt a son ends tragically, but who continues to earn his living rowing passengers to and from his island until the day of his death (Keene, 1956).



A modern story is about Miike Shuntaro, a 78-year-old research scientist in anatomy, who considers suicide but concludes, "Man was meant to work furiously to the end. Why else was he created? Not to bask in the sun, surely. Not just to be happy" (Morris, 1962, p. 138). And so he returns from viewing "The Azaleas of Hira" to finish his several volumes on the "Arterial System of the Japanese."

Another modern story involves a grandmother, Osumi, who sometimes wishes that her widowed daughter-in-law, Otami, would remarry so that Otami could stay home and help with the housework. Otami wants to remain a widow in order to save their land for her son. During a heated argument, Otami says to Osumi, "If you don't want to work, you have no choice but to die" (Akutagawa, 1964, p. 93).

There are a few stories about retired Japanese (see chapter 7), but these are all about very senile and incapacitated elders. These are the "exceptions which prove the rule" that older Japanese are usually expected to continue doing at least some work as long as they are able.

## RETIREMENT

"Retirement" can mean several rather different things. It can mean that the older person has stopped all gainful employment, or it can mean that the older worker has retired from regular employment and now works part-time or occasionally, or it can mean that the older worker has retired from his usual job but is still working as much or more than he ever did (Palmore et al., 1985). In the United States the great majority of retired men fit the first meaning. Earlier we showed that in Japan most men continue to work at least until age seventy despite "retirement" at age fifty-five. About half the "retired" men continue to do the same type of job, either in a different company or on a somewhat reduced basis in the same company; about one-quarter shift to a somewhat different kind of job; and the other quarter move to an entirely different type of job (National Life Center, 1972). We will use retirement in the more general sense of change from usual or regular job regardless of whether the person continues

to work or not. When we want to refer specifically to those no longer working we will use the term "not employed."

About one-third of firms with compulsory retirement ages use fifty-five or younger, about one-fifth have compulsory retirement ages between fifty-six and fifty-nine, while the rest (43 percent) have retirement ages of sixty or over. The proportion using age sixty or over has increased steadily for the past ten years (Ministry of Labor, 1983).

Eighty-one percent of all businesses (and nearly all large firms) have a compulsory retirement system. However, most of these companies also have various exceptions and ways of getting around "compulsory" retirement, such as provisions for creating a new job not subject to compulsory retirement, extending the old job temporarily, or offering a job with reduced pay and changed conditions of employment. The pattern of "permanent employment" in most Japanese firms motivates them to provide some kind of employment for their older workers even after "compulsory retirement" (Cole, 1973).

Workers who "retire" to another job have a drop in earnings of about one-fourth on the average. If they stay in the same company, it drops less (17 percent) and if they move to another company it drops more (33 percent) (National Life Center, 1972). Furthermore, the job after retirement usually has less prestige and power but is also less demanding. Thus, the retired worker usually loses some status upon retirement.

There is considerable talk and some action toward moving the usual retirement age up to sixty and beyond. The average elder now thinks the proper age to retire is about sixty-five (table 5-4). This is similar to U.S. elders but later than for British and French elders.

The two most frequent arguments for raising the usual retirement age are that the nation needs to utilize more fully the skills and potential productivity of older persons, and that because of current low levels of retirement benefits many older persons need continued employment for a decent standard of living. The elders who want a job give income and health as the two most frequent reasons (table 5-5). This distribution of reasons is simi-



Table 5-4. The average Japanese elder thinks 65 is the proper age to retire (percentage distribution of persons 60+)

Proper age to retire	Japan	United States	Great Britain	France
About 50 or earlier	7	3	4	5
About 55	5	4	9	21
About 60	19	16	50	47
About 65	28	29	12	15
About 70	23	12	1	2
About 75	7	2	0	0
About 80	2	3	0	0
Other	8	31	20	5
No answer	2	0	5	4
Mean age	65	64	60	60

Source: Office for the Aged, 1981.

lar to the reasons given for working among the employed elders (table 5-3).

Peter Drucker, on the other hand, believes that the Japanese system of early retirement makes labor costs more flexible and is one factor in "Japan's economic miracle." He argues that since

Table 5-5. Most Japanese elders who want a job do so because of the income or to maintain health (percentage distribution of fully retired 60+ who want a job)

Reasons	Japan	United States	Great Britain	France
Income	39	27	30	15
Enjoy work	8	33	35	44
To have friends	16	27	9	15
To maintain health	30	11	15	14
Other	3	3	11	9
No answer	5	0	0	2

Source: Office for the Aged, 1981.

most retired workers become "temporary" workers at reduced pay who may be laid off if there is not enough work, these workers reduce labor costs and make them more flexible. He also says that, because most firms have programs of continuous training and retraining, worker productivity rises with age so that older workers are more productive than younger workers. He says Japanese studies show that output per man-hour is almost always considerably higher in plants with an older employee population (Drucker, 1971).

Reasons for not working are just as difficult to assess as the reasons for continued employment discussed earlier. However, the recent international survey discussed above found that over three-fourths of the Japanese elders who are not employed say they do not want a job; in that sense they are "voluntary" retirees (Office for the Aged, 1981). This is a slightly higher proportion than in the United States. Thus, it appears that only a small proportion of the fully retired in either country are forced to retire by a compulsory retirement age policy or other age discrimination (see also Palmore et al., 1985).

## TRENDS

But what of the future? Is the present high level of integration of older Japanese in the work force a temporary phenomenon that will rapidly decline in the near future? Forecasting the future is a hazardous undertaking in any field, but based on recent trends it seems probable that there will continue to be only small declines in the employment of the aged. On the other hand, better pensions may cause a greater decline than in the past.

Compared to the aged in the United States, those in Japan have experienced less decline in labor force participation between 1930 and 1980 (table 5-6). While the labor force participation of older Americans was cut by almost two-thirds, that of older Japanese declined only one-third.

A more systematic way of looking at trends in the employment status of the aged is to use the Equality Index (EI) to compare the relative similarity of the aged to the nonaged in terms of labor force participation and occupational and industrial dis-

Table 5-6. Labor force participation has declined less among older Japanese (percentage in labor force by year)

Japan	1930	1965	1980
Total 65+	38	34	26
Men	63	55	41
Women	19	18	16
United States			
Total 65+	30	17	13
Men	54	27	19
Women	7	9	8

Sources: Japanese and U.S. censuses.

tribution. As explained in the Methods section (chapter 1), the EI is a comprehensive measure of the similarity between any two groups that can be used with any type of data. In the present analysis the two groups are the aged (sixty-five and over) and the nonaged adults (ages 15-64). For the labor force EI we use the percentage of each group in the labor force; for the occupation EI we use the percentage distributions of employed persons in the eight standard Japanese Census occupations; and for the industry EI we use the percentage distributions of employed persons in primary, secondary, and tertiary industries. The EI for the United States was computed in a similar way, except that the occupation EI is based on the eleven categories of the U.S. Census and the industry EI is based on the eight categories of that census. Table 5-7 shows the results of this analysis.

As might be expected from the relatively small decline in labor force participation among older Japanese, the labor force EI for Japan shows little decline since 1930. In contrast, the labor force EI in the United States has declined by 33 points. Projected into the future, this would mean that the labor force participation of older Japanese would not fall much more, while that of older Americans would begin to approach zero by the end of the century.

The occupation and industry EI for Japan both show increases, while in the United States occupation has increased but industry

Table 5-7. Trends in equality indexes for Japan and United States in labor force, occupation, and industry (age 65 compared to ages 15-65)

	Past	Present	Annual change
Japan			
Labor force	66(1930)	62(1980)	-.08
Occupation	69(1950)	72(1977)	+.10
Industry	65(1960)	75(1980)	+.50
United States			
Labor force	75(1930)	42(1980)	-.66
Occupation	79(1950)	83(1980)	+.13
Industry	87(1940)	75(1980)	-.30

Sources: Japanese and U.S. censuses.

has decreased. This means that in Japan the differences between older and younger workers' occupations and industries have begun to decline as the rapid pace of social change slows down and new cohorts move into the aged category whose occupations and industries are more similar to those of younger people. In the United States the industries of older generations continued to become more different from those of younger workers, but there is evidence that these differences should diminish by the end of this century (Palmore, 1976).

In summary, this analysis indicates that there probably will continue to be a slow decline in labor force participation among Japanese elders but that their occupations and industries will become more similar to those of younger workers.

#### INTERNATIONAL CORRELATIONS<sup>1</sup>

Another way to estimate future trends in the employment of older Japanese is to look at other countries to see if there is a general association between industrialization and status of the

1. Most of the material in this section comes from an analysis published in Palmore and Manton, 1974.

aged in terms of employment and occupation. If there is a strong linear correlation, this would be a basis for predicting a decline in the relative employment and occupation status of older Japanese insofar as Japan continues to become more industrialized. If there is a strong curvilinear association, this would be a basis for different predictions, depending on Japan's present position on the curve.

In exploring the relationship between modernization and economic status of the aged we used several indicators of modernization. The gross national product per capita was used to measure the increased productivity that results from industrialization. The present degree of industrialization is most directly measured by the percentage of the labor force engaged in agriculture. The *rate* of industrialization was measured by the annual change in the proportion of the labor force engaged in agriculture. Since increased education is associated with modernization and indirectly with industrialization, we analyzed three indicators of education: percentage of adults who are literate, percentage of people aged 5-19 who are in school, and percentage of the population who are in higher education. Data for these statistics came from Russett, 1964, and refer to the period around 1960.

To measure the relative employment status of the aged, we used the categories of "economically active" and "not economically active" to compute the EI of persons sixty-five and over, compared to those of age twenty-five through sixty-four. The occupation EI was computed using the ten major categories given in the UN Demographic Yearbook (1964 and 1965). We were able to find sufficient data to compute the EI in twenty-four countries or territories (table 5-8). We excluded a few very small countries or territories from this analysis both because of the small number of aged and because they may be untypical of most other countries.

The EIs on employment and occupation range from high scores in the eighties (and one of ninety-two) for such nonindustrial countries as El Salvador, the Philippines, Iraq, and Iran to low scores in the fifties for such industrial countries as Canada and the United States (table 5-8). This shows that there is a general negative association between industrialization and economic

Table 5-8. Employment and occupation equality indexes of aged and nonaged in 24 countries

Country	Employment EI	Occupation EI
Canada	53	77
Chile	73	77
Costa Rica	74	81
El Salvador	84	92
Ghana	80	82
Greece	61	72
Honduras	79	89
Hungary	67	54
Iran	86	89
Iraq	88	78
Ireland	73	68
Japan	65	70
Korea	64	80
Malaysia	71	86
Netherlands	60	74
New Zealand	53	84
Norway	63	78
Panama	71	78
Philippines	84	84
Portugal	77	74
Puerto Rico	62	75
Sweden	51	77
Taiwan	54	78
United States	54	79

Source: United Nations, 1964 and 1965.

status of the aged relative to the nonaged: the more highly industrialized countries have less employment for the aged, and the employed aged tend to be concentrated in the older occupations.

In order to examine more precisely what indicators of modernization were most closely associated with economic status of the aged, we first did simple zero-order correlations of each of the six modernization indicators with each of the two economic status EIs. Table 5-9 shows that gross national product has a

Table 5-9. Correlations of modernization indicators and equality indexes ( $N$  = number of countries)<sup>a</sup>

Modernization indicator	Employment EI ( $N$ )	Occupation EI ( $N$ )
GNP per capita	-.79 (22)	-.16 (23)
% in agriculture	.91 (22)	.45 (23)
% change in agriculture	.12 (17)	.29 (16)
% adults literate	-.80 (22)	-.57 (23)
% age 5-19 in school	-.85 (22)	-.58 (23)
% in higher education	-.55 (22)	-.23 (23)

Source: Modernization Indication from Russett, 1964.

<sup>a</sup>Hungary was omitted from the Occupation EI correlations because it was found to lie more than 4 standard deviations away from its predicted position, apparently because of massive changes in occupations among younger adults since it became a communist nation. Also, Taiwan and South Korea were omitted from the Employment EI correlations because they lay more than 4 standard deviations away from their predicted positions, presumably because of the civil wars. Exclusion of these countries did not affect the overall pattern, but did increase the correlations substantially.

strong negative correlation with the employment EI (-0.79) but little correlation with the occupation EI. This suggests that increased productivity tends to decrease employment of the aged (or possibly vice versa) but has little effect on the occupation status of the aged. As for the shift from agriculture, the percentage of the labor force in agriculture is very strongly correlated with the employment EI (0.91) and moderately correlated with occupation EI. This indicates that in most countries the relative employment status of the aged can be mostly explained by the percentage in agriculture: the less in agriculture, the more retirement and unemployment among the aged. On the other hand, the annual percentage change in proportion of the labor force in agriculture has only weak correlations with the two EIs. We suspect that this is because of a time-lag problem: the current EIs are probably affected more by the rate of change in agriculture a generation or two ago than by current rates of change. Of the three measures of education, the percentage of



youths who are in school is more strongly related to both EIS than are the other two measures.

However, when we plotted these indicators of modernization against the EI, we noted that many of the relationships seemed to be J-shaped: in the underdeveloped countries the EIS decline with early modernization, but then the EIS seem to level off and begin to rise in the most modernized countries. Therefore, we tried fitting a quadratic curve to the relationships: that is, we used the quadratic equation of  $Y = a + bX + cX^2$ ; where  $Y$  is the EI,  $a$  is a constant,  $b$  is the linear coefficient,  $c$  is coefficient of the squared term, and  $X$  is the indicator of modernization. The predicted curve from such a quadratic equation is J-shaped and did substantially improve the variance explained over that of the simple correlation for several of the relationships.

Specifically, we tested to see if the variance explained by the best linear correlation of each EI could be significantly improved by using a quadratic equation. The simple linear correlation of percentage in agriculture with the employment EI was so high that the quadratic equation did not significantly improve the variance explained (fig. 5-1). However, the quadratic equation for percentage of youths in school against the occupation EI did improve the variance explained ( $r^2$ ) from 0.34 to 0.40 (fig. 5-2). This improvement was statistically significant at the 0.10 level. An even clearer example of a J-shaped relationship is that between gross national product and employment EI (fig. 5-3). In this case the variance explained was increased from 0.62 to 0.79 by use of the quadratic equation, and the increase was statistically significant at the 0.001 level.

It should be noted that all the countries in all three figures are within or near two standard deviations (dotted lines) from the predicted regression line (solid line). This indicates that, except for the three countries noted in the note to table 5-9 (Hungary, Taiwan, South Korea), there are no countries that deviate much from the general pattern of strong relationships between modernization and status of the aged.

We believe the most interesting aspect of this analysis is the discovery of the J-shaped relationships presented in figures 5-2



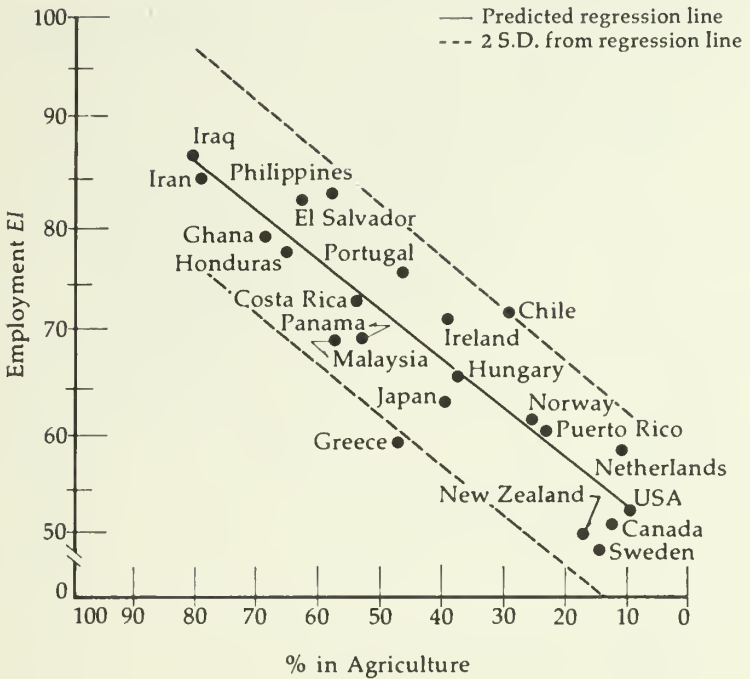


Figure 5-1. Percentage in agriculture and employment EI ( $r^2 = 0.83$ )

and 5-3. These relationships imply that the relative economic status of the aged decreases in the early stages of modernization, but that, after a country has gone through a rapid period of modernization, these aspects of status stabilize and may begin to rise. The most obvious explanation for this reversal is that, during the early stages of modernization, the greatest changes that produce the greatest discrepancies between the aged and non-aged occur, but that when societies "mature" the rates of change (in agriculture and education) level off and the discrepancies between aged and nonaged decrease. There may be other factors such as the growth of new institutions to replace the farm and family in maintaining the status of the aged (e.g., retirement

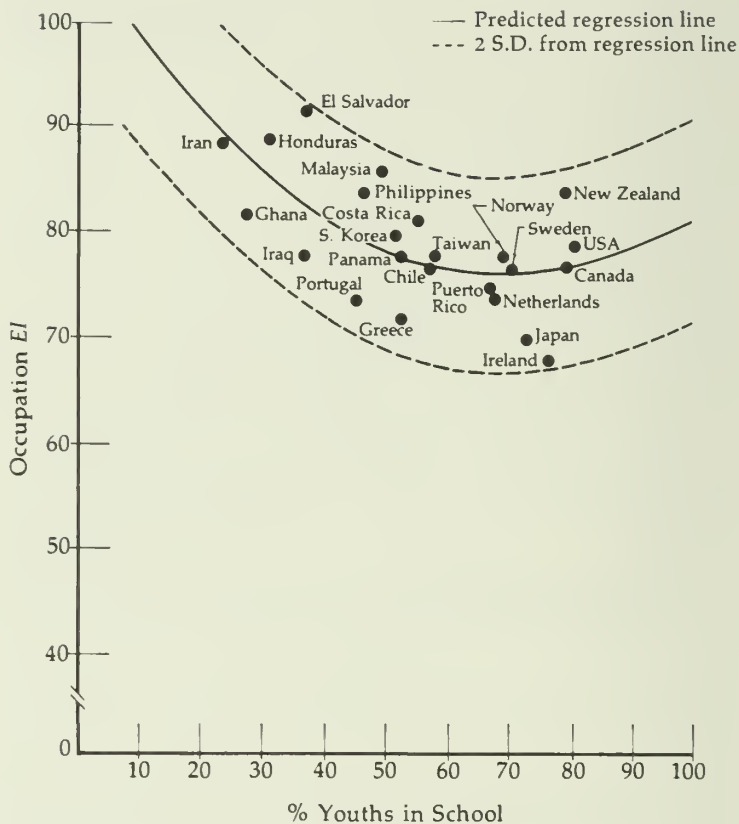


Figure 5-2. Percentage of youths in school and occupation EI ( $r^2 = 0.40$ )

benefits, more adult education and job retraining, policies against age discrimination in employment, etc.).

Specifically, Japan's position on these J-shaped curves suggests that her occupation EI may begin to rise with further increases in education (see fig. 5-2) and that her employment EI may decline somewhat with increased gross national product, but then level off and begin to increase (fig. 5-3).

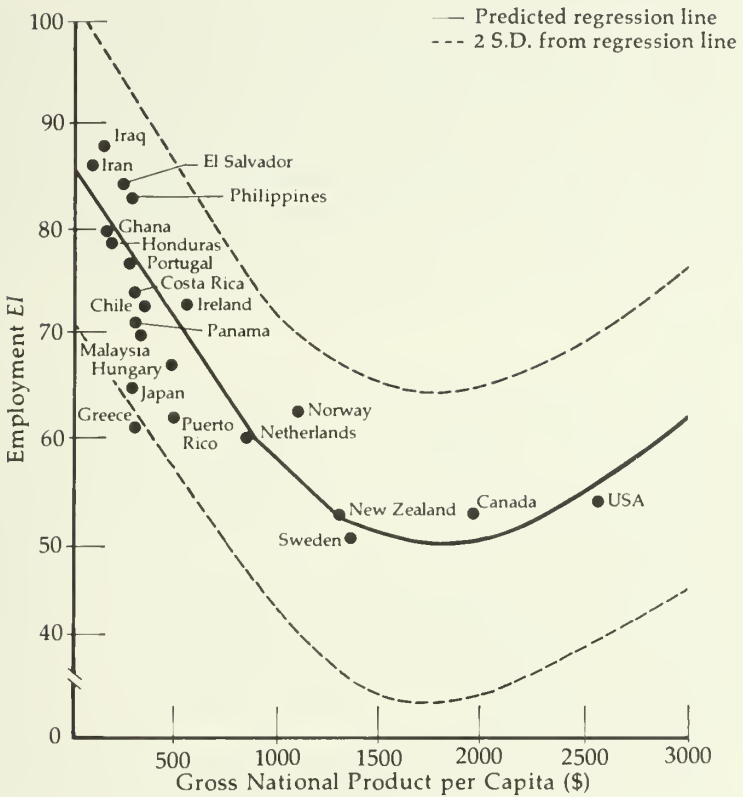


Figure 5-3. Gross national product per capita and employment EI ( $r^2 = 0.79$ )

#### GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

Another basis for predicting little decline in labor force participation of Japanese elders is the many recent government programs designed to increase their employment: (1) Specialists for older workers are assigned to each public employment office. (2) The national government pays up to one-third of one year's wages of workers aged 55–64 hired as regular employees through the public employment office. (3) There are "Silver Human Resource Centers" in each city for those seeking part-time work

after retirement. (4) There is now a quota for all firms which requires that at least 6 percent of their workers must be age fifty-five or older. If this quota is not met, the firms must submit explanations, plans for achieving the quota, and annual reports of their progress. (5) The government now provides subsidies and loans to businesses for improving the workplace and employment opportunities for older workers. (6) The government provides subsidies and encouragement to businesses for the retraining of older workers for new jobs after retirement.

#### SUMMARY

Japan is fundamentally different from other industrial countries in terms of integration of the aged into the labor force. More than twice as many of the ever-employed elders continue to work in Japan compared to those in the comparison countries. This has resulted from two types of factors: economic and cultural. The economic factors include the greater economic necessity to work and the greater opportunities to work due to the structure of the labor force. The cultural factors include the work ethic tradition that every able-bodied person should work as much and as long as possible, and the tradition of seniority and respect for older workers.

Compared to the aged in the other countries, more of the older Japanese workers are self-employed or work in a family business, more are farmers or in sales occupations, and more continue to work longer hours. The majority continue to work for reasons such as enjoyment, health, or duty, rather than because of financial necessity. In Japan "retirement" usually means reduced pay, loss of seniority, a different job, or fewer hours at the same job, rather than complete cessation of work as in the United States. Most of the older workers want to continue working, and most of the retired are voluntary retirees.

Based on past trends and analysis of Equality Indexes, it seems probable that there will continue to be small declines in labor force participation despite government efforts to slow or reverse this trend. The other indicators of occupation and industry equality show that the relative status of older workers

will continue to rise. This trend is also supported by the international correlations showing curvilinear relationships between modernization and economic status. This trend is also occurring in the United States (Palmore, 1976).

Thus, in the area of employment, Japan again demonstrates that the status and integration of elders can remain relatively high despite industrialization.

(X)

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## Income and Support



The "Golden Years" may seem to glow, glitter, and shine; yet have little gold.

Work and retirement are closely related to income and support. If one retires, one must have adequate retirement income or rely on support from family or public assistance. How adequate are the incomes of Japanese elders, and how do they compare to those in other countries?

A cross-cultural evaluation of their financial situation is difficult for several reasons. First, there is no nationwide data on income of all Japanese elders. This is because the majority of them live with their grown children in joint households, forming one economic unit. In such households it is often difficult to separate the income of the elders from that of the other household members. There are data on income of households headed by older Japanese, but these include the income of younger persons in the household, and these households do not represent the elders living in households headed by their children. Furthermore, it is difficult to tell the extent to which elders in joint households are dependent on their children for food and shelter or the extent to which they "pay their own way" through helping in the family business or farm, or through child care or housekeeping. Finally, the way of life and standard of living in Japan are so different from those of other industrial countries that

comparing dollar values of cash income becomes a poor indicator of the actual adequacy of resources.

#### INCOME PATTERNS

However, keeping these limitations in mind, the pattern of household income and savings by age of the household head gives useful information on the relative economic situation of elders living in their own homes. The average annual income of households headed by persons age sixty-five or older in 1982 was about \$15,500 (Office for the Aged, 1983). This was about 90 percent of the average for all households, but it is only 70 percent of the average for households with heads aged 50-54. (Remember that the majority of households with older heads include adult children whose incomes are included in the household income.) Thus, household income tends to increase with age of the head up to ages 50-54, and then decline until it drops to about the same level as those with heads under 45 (fig. 6-1).

The average amount spent by households with heads over sixty was about 80 percent of the average amount spent by all households. This is because they spent less on education and other child expenses, and less on rent because more are homeowners. Because they spent less, they saved more: about half again as much as the average household. As a result, the average savings balance for households with heads over sixty was about \$40,600 in 1982, which was about twice that of all households (Office for the Aged, 1983). Thus, the pattern of savings is a steady rise to a peak in an individual's late fifties (partly because of retirement gratuities), after which they decline slightly and level off in that person's sixties (fig. 6-2).

But what about the many elders who do not head their own households? They tend to have less income and are more dependent on their families for support.

#### INHERITANCE AND SUPPORT FROM CHILDREN

Before World War II, legal requirements and social norms prescribing the duty of the eldest son to support his parents,

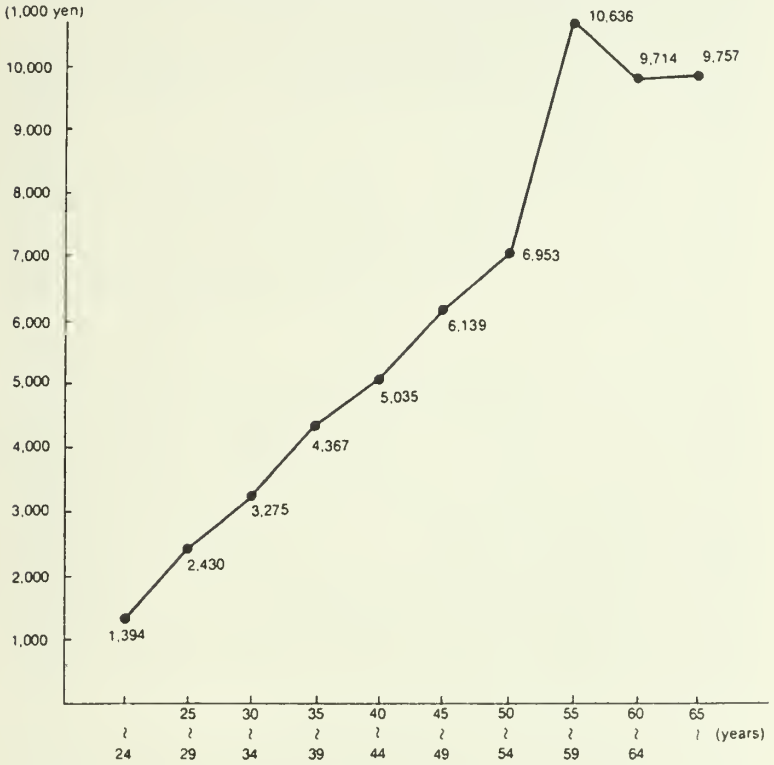
Figure 6-1. Monthly receipts and disbursement per household by age groups of household head (workers' households)



Source: Statistics Bureau, Prime Minister's Office, 1983.



Figure 6-2. Annual saving by age groups of household head



Source : Statistics Bureau, Prime Minister's Office, 1982.

and his corresponding right to inherit all of his parents' property, combined to assure a minimal support for most older Japanese. Although there were some exceptions to this pattern, the system provided a form of "social security" for older Japanese. When there was not a son in the family, a *mukoyōshi* (adopted husband) was usually taken into the family to fulfill the functions of the oldest son.

After World War II, this system was modified so that there is now usually more division of the inheritance among all the children. The present standard regulation is that, if there is no will specifying otherwise, one-third of the father's estate goes to the wife and the other two-thirds is divided equally among the children. When the mother dies, her estate is also divided equally among the children. However, a will can be drawn bequeathing up to half of the father's estate any way the father desires, but the other half must be divided according to the above formula. Therefore, if a father wishes to favor his oldest son, he can bequeath up to half his estate to the oldest son plus the required portion of the other half. The mother can do the same thing, so that the oldest son still can inherit the bulk of the estate if he has only one or two siblings. In fact, the oldest son still is most likely to be the main child caring for his parents and, because of this, is most likely to inherit more of the parents' estate than the other children. Thus, the traditional system has not been abolished but only modified.

Along with this shift in inheritance patterns, there appears to be a shift toward more Japanese believing that savings or social security, rather than children, should become the primary sources of retirement income. In 1970 half of the elders said that the family should be primarily responsible for support of the aged (but only 30 percent of younger persons agreed) (National Life Center, 1972). By 1982 this proportion had declined to one in five, and over half said savings should be the primary source (table 6-1). In fact, Japanese save at a much higher rate than in the United States: 20 percent of disposable income is saved in Japan compared to about 5 percent in the United States (Statistics Bureau, 1983).

The distribution of Japanese responses to this question is now

Table 6-1. Most Japanese elders think retirement income should come from savings or family (percentage distributions of persons 60+)

Source of income	Japan	United States	Great Britain	France
Savings	55	61	44	28
Family	19	1	0	2
Social security pensions	22	29	47	66
Other	3	6	6	3
No answer	2	4	2	1

Source: Office for the Aged, 1981.

similar to that of the United States, except that almost none of the elders in the comparison countries say family should be the primary source of support. Also, more in the other countries say social security should be the primary source.

The actual support patterns show a corresponding shift from dependence on children to income from social security, pensions, and savings. In 1957, eight out of ten Japanese elders were primarily dependent on their family (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 1970). By 1981 this had declined to only 16 percent (table

Table 6-2. More Japanese elders have earnings as their major source of income (percentage distribution of persons 60+)

Major source of income	Japan	United States	Great Britain	France
Earnings	31	15	7	4
Social security pensions	35	54	64	65
Private pensions	4	10	14	18
Savings and investment	7	16	4	6
Sons/daughters	16	0	1	1
Welfare assistance	1	1	3	1
Other	3	4	3	3
No answer	3	0	4	3

Source: Office for the Aged, 1981.

6-2). But compared to the aged in the other industrial countries, Japanese elders were still more often primarily dependent on sons and daughters and were more often dependent on earnings.

Among those elders who do not live with adult children (about one-third), earnings are still the largest single source of income (44 percent) closely followed by pensions and other social security benefits (42 percent) (Office for the Aged, 1983). Relatives contributed less than 5 percent of their total income.

However, when younger adults were asked who would actually provide support if their parents needed it, most (89 percent) said that they themselves or their siblings would provide it (National Life Center, 1972). This is a more accurate reflection of the deep-rooted sense of filial duty in Japan than the beliefs about who should ideally support older people shown in table 6-1.

#### INCOME ADEQUACY

We have seen that the average income of households of those with a head aged sixty-five or over is about 90 percent of that of all households and that these older households have about twice as much savings as the average household. Considering the fact that most of them have less child-related and rental expenses, it would appear that their income and savings are as adequate as those of other age groups. However, it is important to remember that these households with older heads usually include adult children whose income increases the total household income. The income of older households without any adult children is about one-third less than that of all households with older heads (Statistics Bureau, 1983). Furthermore, these households with older heads do not represent those elders living in households headed by their adult children or other relatives. The latter elders are usually older, sicker, and more financially dependent on their families. About one-third of them are primarily dependent on their families for support (Prime Minister's Office, 1975).

Nevertheless, more of the Japanese elders (six out of ten) say that they have no economic difficulty than do elders in any of the other industrial countries (table 6-3). In fact, a total of 85

Table 6-3. More Japanese elders say they have no economic difficulty (percentage distribution of persons 60+)

Economic difficulty	Japan	United States	Great Britain	France
Very difficult	4	10	7	23
Quite difficult	10	18	10	47
A little difficult	26	24	30	24
No difficulty	59	47	51	5
No answer	1	1	1	1

Source: Office for the Aged, 1981.

percent of the Japanese elders report little or no economic difficulty. Apparently, most of those dependent on their families are taken care of adequately. Here again, social desirability bias probably exaggerates the adequacy of their incomes, but this is true in all countries.

#### PENSIONS

The Japanese system of public and private pensions is gradually maturing and becoming more adequate. Nearly all Japanese workers are now covered by some kind of compulsory pension program. The Employees' Pension Insurance covers private enterprise employees, the Mutual Aid Associations cover the public employees, and the National Pension covers the self-employed. There are also many special pension and annuity plans that supplement the basic compulsory programs. Although many of those now age seventy or older were not in these systems long enough to be currently eligible for substantial benefits, it is estimated that by 1990 nearly all retired persons between sixty and seventy will be receiving substantial pensions from one or more of these plans.

How do the wage replacement ratios of Japanese pensions compare with those in other countries? As is often pointed out, international comparison of pension benefits is very difficult and sometimes misleading. However, according to the Ministry of

Health and Welfare, the wage replacement ratio of the Employees' Pension Insurance (for private employees) was 41 percent, which was similar to that of most industrial countries, but even higher than that of France or Canada (table 6-4).

For those over seventy who are not qualified for any of the contributory pensions, a noncontributory pension is available, but the amount of the benefit was only about \$100 per month in 1984. This is about one-third of the standard for public assistance for a single person. The number receiving only the non-contributory pension will rapidly decrease in the future as the contributory programs mature.

In addition to the pensions, public assistance grants are available for those without minimum incomes. This amounted to about \$400 per month for an elderly couple living in a city (which allows minimum subsistence). In addition to this, housing and medical aid is available when necessary.

Another way of evaluating Japan's effort to provide adequate income for the aged is to compare her social security expenditures, especially those for pensions, as a percentage of national income with those of other countries. Japan spends for pensions only about half the percentage of her national income that the other countries do (table 6-5), although this percentage is rapidly increasing. Part of the reason for Japan's lower expenditure is the fact that she still has a smaller proportion of her population over age sixty and an even smaller proportion who are completely retired. However, the main reason is that she started her pension programs relatively late, and they are not as mature as those in

Table 6-4. Japan's wage replacement ratio of pensions is similar to that of other countries (average wage replacement ratio of employee pension for a couple)

Japan	United States	Great Britain	France	West Germany	Sweden	Canada
41	41	41	34	45	41	31

Source: Ministry of Health and Welfare, 1978.

Table 6-5. Japan spends less on social security (1980-82)

	Japan	United States	Great Britain	France
Social security payments as percentage of gross national product	14	16	21	33
Social security pensions as percentage of national income	5	9	7	9

Sources: International Labor Office, 1983; Ministry of Health and Welfare, 1981, 1984c.

the other countries. In both of these respects Japan will "catch up" with the other countries by the end of this century.

#### TRENDS

The major trend has been the shift from dependence on family for support to independent income from earnings, savings, and pensions. A generation ago most elders were primarily dependent on their families for support, but now less than two in ten are. Today the main sources of income are earnings and pensions.

The pension system is younger than in most industrial countries and so is currently paying much less in benefits. But the wage replacement ratio is already as high or higher than in other countries, and by 1990 it will cover nearly all of those under age seventy.

While we do not expect the percentage in the labor force to decline much (chapter 5), the percentage of total income from earnings will probably decline substantially as the percentage of income from pensions increases.

Along with the shift in sources of income, there has been a trend toward relatively larger and more adequate income. In the first edition of this book, we wrote, "The financial situation of older Japanese is probably the weakest part of their current status." At that time only 42 percent of elderly men and 20 per-



cent of elderly women reported that their income was adequate (Prime Minister's Office, 1973). But by 1981, 85 percent reported that they had little or no economic difficulty, and this proportion was higher than in any of the comparison countries (table 6-3). Thus, there clearly has been rapid improvement in the financial situation of Japanese elders.<sup>1</sup>

#### SUMMARY

The old system of primogeniture provided a kind of "social security" for older Japanese through support by the oldest son. This system was modified after World War II so that inheritances tend to be more evenly distributed among all the children. Along with this change has come increasing belief that pensions or savings, rather than the children, should be the primary source of support for retired persons. However, most Japanese with parents still say they would provide support for their parents if they needed it. The actual support patterns show trends away from family support and toward independent income based on earnings and pensions.

Households with heads over sixty have about 90 percent as much income and twice as much savings as the average household. But these households do not represent those elders living in households headed by children or others; they are more likely to be dependent on their family for support. Nevertheless, more Japanese elders say they have little or no economic difficulty than those in any other country.

All Japanese are now covered by compulsory pension programs, but Japan spends less on social security pensions than the comparison countries because the pension systems are relatively "young." As the systems mature, most elders will become eligible for adequate benefits. The outlook is for increasing pension income and decreasing earnings, with a net increase in the adequacy of income.

1. There has been a similar, though less dramatic, improvement in the financial situation of U.S. elders (Shanas, 1982).



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## Respect for the Elders



*Oyakōkō*<sup>1</sup> you  
do; but do you believe that  
gray is beautiful?

The traditional respect for elders in Japan is famous. We have described the basis for this respect in chapter 2. In this chapter we will examine the extent to which this traditional respect is still reflected in actual practice and the extent to which practice and attitudes are changing.

Respect and affection are difficult concepts to measure, even within one culture. Comparable cross-cultural statistics on respect for elders are nonexistent. Therefore, this chapter contains few statistics. However, we can describe typical practices and attitudes and give our impressions about how widespread they are and how they are changing.

### FAMILY RESPECT

We have already described how most older Japanese continue to live with their children, how most of these arrangements appear to be motivated more by desire for companionship, for mutual aid, and attitudes that it is "natural" than by the housing shortage or financial necessity, and how the aged perform many valued services in the household (chapter 4). We believe this is

1. *Oyakōkō* means filial duty to parents.

indirect evidence of a continuing high level of respect and affection for the elders by their families.

Perhaps the most pervasive form of respect for elders in the family (as well as outside the family) is the honorific language used in speaking to or about elders. English and other languages have polite and impolite forms for some words, but Japanese is unusual in its extreme elaboration of different forms to show the proper degree of respect or deference. Differential respect is reflected not only in the different nouns, verbs, prefixes, suffixes, and other parts of speech, but also in the basic grammar and syntax of the language. There are three basic forms of speech in Japanese: the honorific form, which is used in speaking to or referring to someone who is older or otherwise socially superior to the speaker; the middle form, which is used in speaking to someone on approximately the same social level; and the plain or blunt form, which is usually used in speaking to younger persons and others socially inferior to the speaker. There are many other complications, depending on whether the speaker and listener and person referred to are in the same or different "in-group" or whether the setting is formal or informal, etc. Nevertheless, respect for elders is one of the basic dimensions built into the Japanese language. This is one of the main reasons why it is so difficult for foreigners to learn to speak proper Japanese: not only must they learn the many different forms, but they also must understand the culture enough to know which relationships call for which form.

Another traditional form of respect for elder family members is seating arrangement. The main room of a Japanese house, which usually doubles as a dining-living room during the day and a bedroom at night, contains a *tokonoma*, an alcove in which various scrolls, art objects, or flower arrangements are displayed, depending on the season or occasion. The seat nearest the *tokonoma* is the seat with the highest honor, and the honor of each seat is ranked by its distance from the *tokonoma*. Traditionally, the seat with the highest honor is occupied by the oldest male in the family. His wife would usually occupy the second highest seat, and all the other household members would be arranged in descending order according to age and sex. In many modern

households, if the oldest male has retired from being head of the household, the highest seat will be given to the present head of the household, and the oldest male (retired) will be moved down to the second or third highest seat.

The same order of prestige is followed in serving. The oldest male is usually served first; the youngest female is served last. An exception is made for an infant who is usually not made to wait as long as others who are actually higher in status. Not only are the elders served first, they also get the choicest portions of whatever is served.

A similar order of precedence is usually followed in all household matters. The elders and head of household go through doors before younger persons and walk down the street in front of younger persons. The elders and head of household also get to use the family bath (*ofuro*) first. The advantage of this requires some explanation: The *ofuro* is a deep tub of very hot water in which Japanese soak after washing and ~~rinsing off~~ outside the tub. This same water is used for soaking by every one bathing during one evening. Therefore, each person soaking in the *ofuro* leaves a residue of body oils, perspiration, etc., which gradually reduces the purity of the water. Thus, the first user gets the cleanest water.

In cooking, also, the tastes of the elders are often given precedence. If the elders like the rice cooked soft for easier chewing, it will usually be cooked soft even if the young want it firm. If the elders like the food salty or sour, it will usually be salty or sour regardless of the others' tastes. The elders and head of household usually get the rooms with the best exposure (usually the sunny one or the one with the best view). They also usually get the best silks, decorations, and bedding (*futon*). When guests bring gifts, the gifts will often be chosen primarily to please the elders.

Adult children who have left the family home show respect and affection for their parents by returning to the family home to celebrate their parents' birthdays and special holidays, such as Respect for the Aged Day, *O-bon* festivals, New Year's Day, and Christmas.<sup>2</sup> Throughout the year dutiful sons and daughters

2. Christmas is, of course, celebrated in the approximately 1 percent of homes

keep in close contact with their parents through frequent visits, letters, and phone calls. Many adult children call their parents every day even when they must use long distance.

There are four special birthday celebrations in old age. Age seventy is called *koki*, which means "rare old age," because in the past it was rare for anyone to live to that age. The seventy-seventh year is called the "pleasure age" (*kiju*) because the character for seventy-seven is similar to the one for "pleasure." The eighty-eighth year is called the "rice age" (*bei ju*) because the character for eighty-eight is similar to that for rice. Since rice is the basic food in Japan (indeed, the word for cooked rice, *gohan*, can also mean food in general), the "rice year" is considered to be a fortunate and important year. The ninety-ninth year is the "purity year" (*haku ju*) because the character for white or purity has one less stroke than the character for one hundred and therefore can represent ninety-nine. The birthdays marking the beginning of these special years become special occasions for family celebrations to honor the elder parent.

In the United States there is usually little ceremony at family occasions. In Japan it is precisely in the family where respect for elders is learned and meticulously observed. Benedict (1946) observed:

While the mother still carries the baby strapped to her back she will push his head down with her hand (to bow), and his first lessons as a toddler are to observe respect behavior to his father or older brother (or grandparents). . . . It is no empty gesture. It means that the one who bows acknowledges the right of the other to have his way in things he might well prefer to manage himself, and the one who receives the bow acknowledges in his turn certain responsibilities incumbent upon his station. Hierarchy based on sex and generation and primogeniture are part and parcel of family life. (pp. 48f)

This is still generally true today. When a younger person bows to his elder, the younger person bows lower and stays down

that are Christian; but a secular version of Christmas is also surprisingly popular in other Japanese homes.

longer than the elder. The elder may acknowledge the bow with a simple nod of his head.

There are popular sayings that illustrate family respect for the elders. One riddle says, "Why is a son who wants to offer advice to his parents like a Buddhist priest who wants to have hair on the top of his head?" (Buddhist priests, of course, shave their heads.) The answer is, "However much he wants to do it, he can't" (Benedict, 1946). The following dilemma is often posed: If a man's mother and his wife were both drowning at the same time, whom should the man rescue first? In earlier times the answer usually given was his mother because she is elder to his wife. These days the proper answer is not so clear, and there is considerable debate about whether a man's mother or his wife should take precedence. This may be contrasted with the United States where the usual answer would clearly be his wife because a man's primary loyalty is expected to be to his wife.

You may notice that we have often used the terms *respect* and *affection* together, and you may question whether these two different attitudes can go together or whether they are mutually incompatible. To contemporary Americans with their strong egalitarian values, it may seem unlikely that you could be truly affectionate toward one before whom you must bow and continually demonstrate subservience. The Japanese do not usually view this as a problem. In fact, they tend to regard a vertical relationship, with authority and responsibility on one side and respect and subservience on the other, to be conducive to affection between the persons involved. They simply do not value independence and equality in personal relations as much as Americans do, but rather they value dependence and deference in most relationships (Nakane, 1972).

It should be understood that the prerogatives of age are usually balanced by responsibilities and concepts of fairness.

The prerogatives of generation, sex, and age in Japan are great. But those who exercise these privileges act as trustees rather than as arbitrary autocrats. The father or the elder brother is responsible for the household, whether its members are living, dead, or yet unborn. He must make weighty

decisions and see that they are carried out. He does not, however, have unconditional authority. He is expected to act responsibly for the honor of the house. . . . The master of the house saddles himself with great difficulties if he acts without regard for group opinion. (Benedict, 1946, p. 54)

Thus, the elder normally "earns" affection and respect from younger family members through his fairness, wisdom, and aid. Hearn describes the ideal traditional Japanese family in utopian terms that show how respect, mutual aid, and affection ideally reinforce one another:

Of course, the old family organization had certain advantages which largely compensated the individual for his state of subjection. It was a society of mutual help; and it was not less powerful to give aid, than to enforce obedience. Every member could do something to assist another member in case of need: each had a right to the protection of all. This remains true of the family today. In a well-conducted household, where every act is performed according to the old forms of courtesy and kindness,—where no harsh word is ever spoken,—where the young look up to the aged with affectionate respect,—where those whom years have incapacitated for more active duty, take upon themselves the care of the children, and render priceless service in teaching and training,—an ideal condition has been realized. The daily life of such a home,—in which the endeavour of each is to make existence as pleasant as possible for all,—in which the bond of union is really love and gratitude,—represents religion in the best and purest sense; and the place is holy. . . . (Hearn, 1955, p. 76)

It seems unlikely that such a utopian household was ever widespread, but the mere existence of such an ideal illustrates the power of respect and affection for elders as motivating forces in Japanese family life.



The question remains: How widespread is such family respect for elders in contemporary Japan? Our interviews with Japanese of all ages in rural and urban areas found estimates ranging from 90 percent in rural areas to a minority among young urban people. It is safe to say that there is more respect for elders in rural areas, in traditional occupations and households, and among middle-aged or older persons than in urban areas, "modern" households, and younger persons. This can also be inferred from the statistics showing differences by place of residence and age as to living arrangements and support patterns.

#### PUBLIC RESPECT

The amount of public respect in Japan for elders may be best documented by quoting from the 1963 National Law for the Welfare of the Elders (Number 133): "The elders shall be loved and respected as those who have for many years contributed toward the development of society, and a wholesome and peaceful life shall be guaranteed to them. In accordance with their desire and ability, the elders shall be given opportunities to engage in suitable work or to participate in social activities."

This law also declares that "any person who is engaged in a service which directly affects the life of the elders shall endeavor to promote the welfare of the elders in the management of that enterprise." Also, "the Central Government and local public bodies have responsibility to promote the welfare of the elders" (Article 4).

In contrast, the comparable law in the United States, the Older Americans' Act of 1965 (U.S. Public Law 89-73), does not make any mention of love and respect for the aged. Nor does it even attempt to *guarantee* a "wholesome and peaceful life." Rather it states only that the duty of the government is to *assist* older people to secure equal opportunity to adequate income, health, housing, employment, etc. (Title 1). This does seem to reflect a basically different attitude toward older people in Japan and the United States.

In order to fulfill its "guarantee" of a wholesome and peaceful

life, the Japanese government has undertaken a series of programs for its elders:

1. *Health Examination.* Cities and towns hold annual health examinations for those who are forty years of age or older. Individual guidance is then given to those who need further diagnosis or treatment.

2. *Home for the Aged.* For those sixty-five years or older who need to find a protective environment other than their home, the following three kinds of institutions are provided by the law: Nursing Home (*Yogo Rojin*); Special Nursing Home (*Tokubetsu Yogo Rojin*) for those who are in need of constant medical supervision; and Home with Moderate Fee (*Keihi Rojin*) for those who choose to live in the institution and are able to afford a moderate charge.

3. *Family Foster Care.* For those who have no family to live with.

4. *Grant of Medical Cost.* Free medical care for most persons over age seventy.

5. *Home Helper.* Housekeeping help for old people living alone.

6. *Welfare Centers for the Aged.* Over 1,600 such centers have been established throughout Japan to provide various educational, recreational, and consulting services.

7. *Rest Houses and Homes.* Over 3,500 rest houses (small neighborhood centers for the elders) and sixty-nine rest homes (vacation houses for elders in areas of scenic beauty or hot springs) existed as of 1983.

8. *Old People's Clubs.* There are over 125,000 such clubs to promote community activities, social services, education, recreation, and sports for elders.

9. *Employment Opportunities.* See chapter 5.

10. *Other Programs.* There are numerous other programs for elders, including free "gadget beds" and special equipment for the bedfast; short-stay services and day care service at special nursing homes; telephone centers to provide counseling service to lonely elders; temporary home care service for elders living alone; adult education programs; subsidies for sports meetings



for elders; and designation of September 15 as Respect for Elders Day.

Respect for Elders Day (*Keirō No Hi*) is one of the most dramatic expressions of respect and affection for the elders. Ceremonies in honor of the elders have been widespread for more than three hundred years, but in 1963 Respect for Elders Day became a national holiday. The law specifies that "the governments of various levels should hold suitable activities to evoke the people's interest in and understanding of the welfare needs of the aged as well as to encourage old people to improve and enrich their own lives." On each September 15 the Ministry of Health and Welfare presents a silver cup and a letter from the premier congratulating each person who reached the age of one hundred during the past year. In Tokyo the Metropolitan Government presents a silver fan to those who became one hundred during the year; a "respect for elders" medal to those who became seventy-five; and gifts of 5,000 yen (about \$20) to each of the more than 200,000 persons over the age of seventy-five in the city. Newspapers run feature articles on the aged and on the celebrations and rallies that are held in most cities. Even small hamlets usually have some kind of ceremony and celebration with gifts of honor for the elders in the community. In large cities there are usually several different celebrations, which include music and entertainment, speeches by important officials, and gifts to honor the very old and those who have worked to help elders during the year.

A more traditional form of respect for elders was the practice of younger persons giving their seats to elders on public vehicles such as buses, subways, and trains. Traditionally, all younger persons were supposed to give their seats to any older person when there were no other seats, simply to show their respect, regardless of whether they appeared infirm or not. In recent years there have been many complaints, especially from older persons, that younger people were no longer giving their seats to elders.

As a result, starting on Respect for the Elders Day in 1973, the Tokyo railways and subways reserved six seats on every

fourth car for use by the aged and the physically handicapped. The seats are silver-gray in color (instead of the usual blue) and are called "silver seats." Prominent signs on the outside and inside of the cars explain that the aged and physically handicapped have priority in the use of these seats.

The program has been quite successful, so successful that there is now talk of eliminating them because most people now give their seats to elders and handicapped regardless of whether the seats are designated as "silver seats" or not.

One indirect indicator of rising concern for the elders is the recent growth in gerontology. In the past twenty to thirty years Japan, like the United States and several other industrial countries, has had a rapid increase in the number of scientists and other professionals doing research and education in gerontology. There are two aspects of this growth, however, that show unusual strength in Japan. One is the fact that the Japanese government now does an annual survey of some aspect of the aged and their problems. Another is the impressive size and resources of the Tokyo Metropolitan Institute on Gerontology. Begun in 1971, this institute now has a staff of 156 professionals plus another 35 research associates. It is devoted entirely to research, although some of the staff also engage in treatment and teaching. It is housed in a large modern building adjoining several other facilities for the aged, including a geriatric hospital, a special nursing home, and a home for the aged. The institute contains departments of biology, pathology, biochemistry, pharmacology, physiology, nutrition, psychology, psychiatry, sociology, epidemiology, rehabilitation, and nursing. It also has special laboratories for electronic microscopy, radioisotopes, computer science, and animals. This institute is much larger and more comprehensive in its research than any institute of gerontology in the United States (except for the National Institute on Aging in Washington, D.C.).

Another indicator of public respect for elders is the previously mentioned fact that the legislature, corporations, universities, religious organizations, and other such institutions are largely controlled by elders (Christopher, 1983). This is a result of the seniority system in which prestige and power tend to increase

with age. Japan does not have a true gerontocracy in which elders have all the power, but it is clear that they have a greater share of the power and prestige than other age groups. Most Japanese believe this is as it should be, since they assume that maturity and wisdom tend to increase with age and that power should be given to those with the most maturity and wisdom—the elders. It is true that some younger people criticize this system; but the system endures basically unchanged. Younger people in most societies tend to criticize the establishment when they are outside it, and then tend to join the establishment and defend it as they grow older.

#### SELF-RESPECT

One key difference in the attitudes of Japanese and Americans toward aging: most Japanese over sixty-five do not try to hide their age, while most Americans do. In fact, most Japanese men and many women tend to be proud of their elder status. It is considered polite and proper to ask an older Japanese his or her age and to congratulate him/her on it. Most Americans know it is impolite to ask an older American his or her age, and if the truth comes out, the best one can do is to reassure the older person that he/she does not look “that old.” I have collected over thirty jokes about older Americans concealing their age (Palmore, 1971). The popularity of hair dyes and cosmetics to conceal wrinkles attests to the prevalence of age concealment among older Americans. Some middle-aged Japanese women also dye their graying hair, but most older Japanese do not. It would be an exaggeration to say that most Japanese believe “gray is beautiful,” but at least they believe it is natural and should be accepted as it is.

There are some cross-cultural statistics that do reflect this greater self-respect among Japanese elders. They tend to say that old age starts at a younger age than do elders in the comparison countries (table 7-1). The other countries also have much greater proportions who deny old age by refusing to answer. Japanese usually think of themselves as elders when they become grandparents, and they are proud of being grandparents. Most Ameri-

Table 7-1. More Japanese elders say old age starts earlier (percentage distributions of persons 60+)

Old age starts at	Japan	United States	Great Britain	France
55 or younger	4	3	1	4
About 60	14	7	4	15
About 65	25	13	9	13
About 70	29	15	11	19
75 or older	16	29	27	18
Other or no answer	14	23	48	31
Mean age	67	71	72	68

Source: Office for the Aged, 1981.

cans deny that they are old until many years after they become grandparents.

Similarly, Japanese elders more often admit they feel old than do other elders (table 7-2). Larger proportions in the other countries (an actual majority in Great Britain) claim they "never" feel old. Both of these tables show that Japanese elders tend to be more accepting and less denying of the realities of old age.

Table 7-2. Japanese elders more often feel old (percentage distributions of persons 60+)

Frequency of feeling old	Japan	United States	Great Britain	France
Often	21	13	5	19
Sometimes	36	23	30	32
Seldom	26	23	13	15
Never	14	40	52	34
No answer	2	1	0	0

Source: Office for the Aged, 1981.

## OBASUTE VERSUS RESPECT FOR ELDERS

Ninety miles west of Tokyo there are a railway station and a nearby mountain that bear the name *Obasute*, which means "discarding grandmother." There is no evidence that at any time in more than a thousand years of recorded history the Japanese have abandoned the aged as a matter of custom. But the *Obasute* theme can be traced through tales dating from the sixth century to the present (Plath, 1972). The usual theme is set in a mountain village where food is always scarce. Custom in this village decrees that old people make a "pilgrimage" to the mountain during their seventieth year, where they stay and await death. The younger kinsman who accompanies them either abandons them or, if they prove recalcitrant, pushes them over a cliff. The story also can end in three other ways: the younger companion suffers remorse and returns to rescue the old woman; or he returns too late and she is already dead; or the son refuses to abandon his aged mother and hides her away instead. In this latter version the son is able to solve a series of vexing problems for the ruler of the land by consulting his hidden parent. As a reward, the ruler offers anything in his power, but the son asks only that the custom of abandonment be abolished (Keene, 1957).

Resentment against the aged is also the main theme of a widely read short story, "The Hateful Age" (*Iyagarase No Nen-rei*), by Niwa Fumio (Morris, 1962). The story is about Old Ume who has been a widow for fifty-four years and has already outlived her own children. Her grandchildren feel obligated to care for her but keep passing her from one to the other. She is withered, feeble, useless, and insensitive: "Ume had become just a body, in which it was impossible to detect the slightest trace of soul, spirit, conscience, or anything that makes human beings worthy of respect. Her greatest worry in life was that her grandchildren or great-grandchildren might be getting better food than she, herself. . . . (Such persons) become distasteful, useless lumps of flesh, the scourge of relatives and a burden to society" (p. 340).

A best-selling novel, *A Man in a Trance* (*Kōkotsu No Hito*) by Sawako Ariyoshi (1972), depicts the resentment against an

84-year-old widower by his son and family. The widower is senile, and his daughter-in-law hated the fact that she had to take care of him. She often wished for his quick death because she was working, and unexpected events made it difficult to carry on her work. However, after an incident her way of thinking changes and she decides to take care of her father-in-law willingly "until the end."

These popular stories indicate that there is widespread resentment against the burdens of caring for those few aged who are completely senile and incapacitated. On the other hand, there are many stories that show respect for the elders by portraying them as wise, skillful, and devoted. The following are some examples of this type.

In the classic story, "Robe of Feathers," it is the aged mother who wisely advises her son not to try to keep an angel captive: "My son, it is not wise to meddle in the affairs of these unearthly people." But the son loves the angel so much that he does keep her captive and, as a result, the angel's beauty slowly dims until one day she escapes and leaves the son heartbroken (Harris, 1937).

Another classic story, with some historical basis, is about Ōkubo Hikozaemon who is described as a "brusque, humorous, self-willed old fellow." The Shogun Iyeyasu (sixteenth century) grew to love him "almost as a brother" because of his blunt honesty and loyalty. When he was offered the position of *Daimyo*, or lord, he refused, but instead asked permission of the Shogun to do anything he wished such as being insolent and critical to the lords and even to the Shogun himself. The Shogun agreed, and as a result, "If any *Daimyo* should lose his loyalty to that line, was too extravagant, or fail in any other way, Hikozaemon would be there to chastise him without fear or mercy." Hikozaemon even tore the branches off the Shogun's prize Kimura Plum Tree to show the Shogun how cruel was his rule that punished by death anyone who broke a branch of the tree. The Shogun realized the foolishness of his rule and confessed, "Truly, I was wrong, old man, and you were right." The story concludes: "This licensed insolence of Ōkubo Hikozaemon often tasted as a bitter medicine to others, but it was a tonic medicine,



and helped to preserve the peace and power of those three successive Shoguns to the end of his own long life" (Harris, 1937, pp. 224f).

A modern story titled "Saigo Takamori" is about a wise old professor who meets a know-it-all student on a train and challenges his absolute faith in historical records by making him think that Saigo Takamori (a famous General who was supposed to have committed suicide in 1877) may still be alive (Akutagawa, 1964). The wisdom and skill of the elders are also illustrated by the modern story of Takizawa Bakin, an elderly author who is still an inspired and sensitive master-writer (Akutagawa, 1964).

Respect for the authority of the elders is illustrated by "Morning Mist," which involves an old professor of mathematics and his son who wants to get married. The old father is reluctant to give permission to his son to marry because he does not want a new person in the household who might upset his routine. Despite the fact that the old father is getting senile and obsessive about routine and order, his authority to withhold permission is never questioned (Morris, 1962).

There is general agreement among Japanese observers and pollsters that these positive images of elders are more common than the negative images shown in the *Obasute* theme. There are often complaints that younger people are not as respectful as they used to be, or not as respectful as they should be, but little questioning of the basic assumption that all people should respect their elders. All observers agree that the vast majority of Japanese still have substantially more respect for most of their elders than do most Americans.

Ruth Benedict contrasts our attitudes with the Japanese attitudes by describing two different "arcs of life" (fig. 7-1):

The arc of life in Japan is plotted in opposite fashion to that in the United States. It is a great shallow U-curve with maximum freedom and indulgence allowed to babies and to the old. Restrictions are slowly increased after babyhood till having one's own way reaches a low just before and after marriage. This low line continues many years during

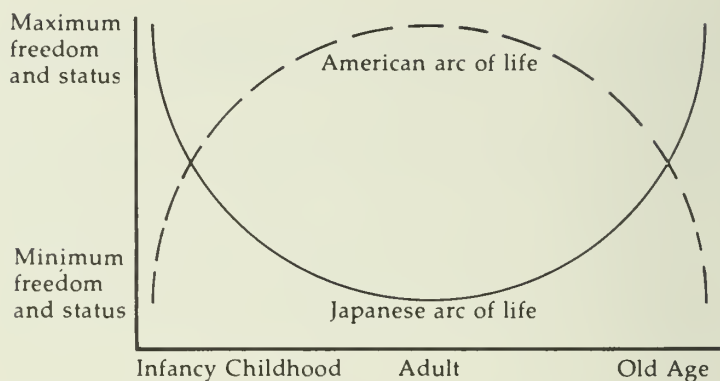


Figure 7-1. Japanese and American arc of life (after Benedict, 1946).

the prime of life, but the arc gradually ascends again until after the age of sixty men and women are almost as unhampered by shame as little children are. In the United States we stand this curve upside down. Firm disciplines are directed toward the infant and these are gradually relaxed as the child grows in strength until a man runs his own life when he gets a self-supporting job and when he sets up a household of his own. The prime of life is with us—the high point of freedom and initiative. Restrictions begin to appear as men lose their grip or their energy or become dependent. It is difficult for Americans even to fantasy a life arranged according to the Japanese pattern. (1946, p. 254)

#### TRENDS

The contrast shown by these two arcs has probably lessened since World War II, with the Japanese becoming somewhat more like Americans, and of course there are always exceptions to such simplified patterns.

The difficult question is: how fast are these practices and attitudes changing? It is clear that Western culture and indus-



trialization have made an impact. Older persons who are upset with the decline in respect for elders often blame it on the impact of American occupation after World War II. But because no one has measured the amount of respect for elders either before or after World War II, no one really knows how much impact there was or how much this respect is changing. Our impressions are that there has been substantial change since World War II, so that many of these practices and attitudes of respect have declined, especially among young urban people.

For example, it is often said that relations between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law in a home have reversed: while the mother-in-law used to be the stronger, now the daughter-in-law is the stronger. Actually, this varies depending on their financial power, health, personality, etc.

An example of declining power of the elders is the fact that the proportion of marriages arranged by parents or an elder matchmaker has declined substantially. After World War II about two-thirds of marriages were arranged marriages; now over two-thirds are "love marriages" not arranged by elders (Economic Planning Agency, 1983). But notice that almost one-third of marriages are still arranged by elders, in contrast to the United States where almost no marriages are arranged by elders.

Thus, there still remain vast differences between Japanese and Americans in the amount of respect for elders. It is true that most Japanese have modified the more extreme expressions of subservience toward elders. Whereas all elders used to be respected simply because they were older, now the majority of elders continue to "earn" respect, but some elders are no longer respected if they are viewed as unjust, immoral, or just unpleasant. In contrast, in America the majority of the aged probably suffer from disrespect simply because they are old (or old-fashioned), and only a minority can maintain much respect from younger generations because of unusual accomplishments and contributions.

A way to visualize the change in status of the aged in Japan and the United States is presented in figure 7-2. There is considerable evidence that the status of the aged in the United States has been declining, at least since the turn of the century.

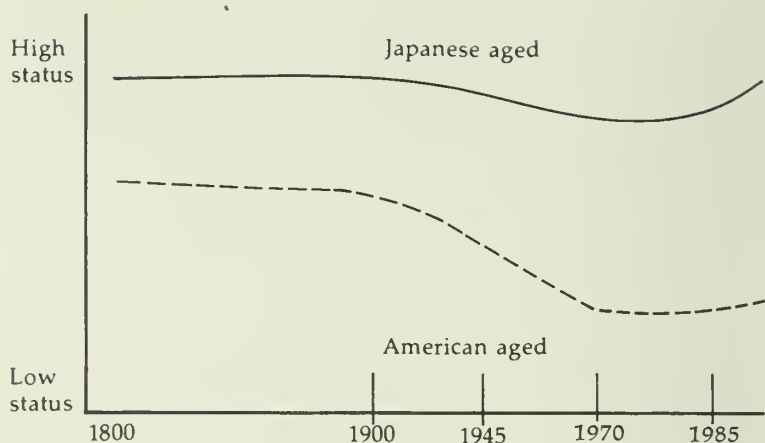


Figure 7-2. Change in status of Japanese and American aged

Equality Indexes comparing aged with non-aged Americans in the areas of income, weeks worked, hours worked, industry, and education all show substantial declines between 1940 and 1970 (Palmore and Whittington, 1971). In contrast, Equality Indexes in Japan show relatively little decline (chapter 5). Thus, figure 7-2 shows a marked decline in the status of American aged beginning at about the turn of the century, while there is relatively little decline shown for the status of the Japanese aged, and that decline begins mainly after World War II. Furthermore, the status of Japanese elders was much higher than that of American elders to begin with, so that declines in both countries still leave the Japanese elders with substantially higher status than their American counterparts.

Indeed, there is evidence that there may be a resurgence of higher status for elders in both Japan and the United States. In Japan there has been a resurgence of many traditional practices, ranging from the greater use of traditional dress to exhortations for more filial piety. The evidence presented in previous chapters indicates that the health, education, occupations, and income of Japanese elders are improving. There is similar evidence in the

United States showing recent increases in the relative health and socioeconomic status of American elders (Palmore, 1976, 1985). These recent trends are illustrated by the upturns of the trend lines since 1970 (fig. 7-2).

#### SUMMARY

Traditional practices in the family that show respect for elders include honorific language, giving the best seats to elders, serving elders first, allowing elders to bathe and go through doors first, catering to the tastes of elders in cooking, children returning to parents' homes for holidays and birthdays, the special celebration of the sixty-first and other birthdays, and bowing to elders. Family respect for elders is also reflected in several popular sayings. Respect for elders is usually accompanied by affection based on the elders' fairness, wisdom, and aid. Respect for elders is more widespread in rural areas than urban, more in traditional households than modern, and more among the middle-aged than among the younger children. Patterns of respect appear to be changing, especially since World War II, so that the more extreme forms of subservience are declining, and some elders are no longer respected if they are viewed as unjust, immoral, or unpleasant.

Public respect for elders is demonstrated by the National Law for Welfare of the Aged, Respect for Elders Day, the practice of younger persons giving their seats to elders on public vehicles, and the many special programs and services for elders by the government and other agencies. The growth of gerontology reflects the growing concern in Japan for the problems of the aged.

In contrast to the traditional respect for elders, there is also a theme of resentment and desire to abandon senile and incapacitated aged that can be found in many stories and novels. Furthermore, there have been substantial declines in the amount of respect for elders.

Nevertheless, there are still basic differences between Japan and the United States in attitudes and treatment of the aged. These differences are illustrated by Ruth Benedict's "Arc of

Life" and by a graph showing earlier and greater decline of respect for elders in America than in Japan. As a result, most American elders tend to be ashamed of their age and try to hide it, while most Japanese elders tend to be proud of their longevity and seniority.

There is evidence in both countries that the status of elders is beginning to return toward relatively higher levels.

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## Activities and Satisfaction



Morning, noon, and night,  
actions and satisfactions,  
chicken and the egg.

We have shown how the Japanese elders are more integrated and active in their families and in the labor force. This chapter focuses on their other activities and what satisfactions they derive from these activities, as well as their dissatisfactions and fears about the future. Finally, it discusses some evidence relevant to the activity versus disengagement controversy.

### ACTIVITIES

What do the honorable elders do with their time? How many hours do they spend in sleep, in obligated duties, and how many hours of leisure time remain? They appear to sleep about the same number of hours as older Americans, but because of more time spent at work and doing housework, older Japanese have about one-third less leisure time (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 1972). This fits the general pattern of greater activity and involvement among older Japanese.

As in other industrial countries, the most frequent leisure activity of Japanese elders is watching television (table 8-1). Reading, traveling, and gardening are also popular leisure activities. However, Japanese elders report fewer hobbies than do elders in other countries (table 8-1). This is probably because

Table 8-1. Japanese elders have fewer hobbies (percentages of persons 60+, multiple answers)

Hobby	Japan	United States	Great Britain	France
Reading	23	78	71	67
Watching TV	66	83	84	86
Radio	14	65	65	71
Knitting/sewing/etc.	15	33	38	39
Cooking	6	48	50	51
Traveling	30	46	38	30
Gardening	25	40	41	39
Watching sports	15	41	47	8
Playing sports	8	30	7	11
Walking	14	51	44	46
Going to cinema/theater	9	30	20	14
Listening to music	6	69	63	32
Playing music/singing	8	15	11	5
Betting/gambling	1	10	12	19
Painting/sculpture/writing	8	11	6	3
Playing games	11	44	35	30
Other	5	7	7	2
None of these hobbies	8	0	0	0
Mean number of hobbies per person	2.7	7.0	6.4	5.5

Source: Office for the Aged, 1981.

the Japanese are more work-oriented and have less leisure time left after their jobs and household duties are over. Another reason may be that the present generation of elders spent most of their lives during an era when there was little leisure for most adults, and many did not have the time or interest to develop hobbies.

However, there are a number of distinctively Japanese hobbies that are becoming more popular among the elders: composing *haiku* and *waka* (forms of poetry); *shigin* (chanting poetry); *bonsai* (the growing and shaping of miniature trees); *ikebana* (flower arranging); tea ceremony; playing *go* and *shōgi* (the

Japanese equivalent of checkers and chess); playing instruments such as the *shamisen* (somewhat like a banjo) and the *koto* (somewhat like a horizontal harp); folk dancing; and calligraphy. One of the most widespread and increasingly popular sports among the elders is "gate-ball," which is a Japanese version of croquet. Almost all neighborhoods, especially in middle and southern Japan, have organized teams and leagues for gate-ball, and they practice or compete on a daily basis.

Another frequent activity of Japanese elders is visiting with their neighbors. A majority say they "often" visit neighbors, and another third say they "occasionally" visit (table 8-2). There is apparently more visiting done in rural areas, with only 8 percent saying they do not visit neighbors. This fits with the data given earlier (chapter 4) showing that few older Japanese report being lonely.

Going on overnight trips to visit shrines, scenic spots, and relatives is another favorite activity of the majority of elders, especially among those aged sixty to seventy (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 1972). The majority of those going on overnight trips do so several times each year. Typically, these trips are taken with friends or family members, but going with a club, with fellow workers, or on commercial tours are also frequent. Only 5 percent make such trips alone. It is a common sight in Japan to see groups of a dozen or so gray-haired elders being led around by a tour guide with a flag at the head of the column.

Table 8-2. A majority of older Japanese often visit with neighbors (percentage distribution)

Visits	Total	Big cities	Other cities	Rural
Often visit neighbors	55	36	51	65
Occasionally visit	32	44	34	27
No visits	12	19	14	8
No answer	1	1	1	1
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: Welfare Journal, 1971.

We have mentioned how most cities and towns have special clubs for the elders that are usually organized and subsidized by the government. About one-half of all Japanese over sixty belong to these clubs (Officer for the Aged, 1983). Participation is even greater in rural areas and among those over seventy. These clubs usually meet at least once a month for lectures, gardening and landscaping the community, cleaning and repairing community centers, singing and dancing parties, going to an *onsen* (public hot bath) party, study meetings, etc. These clubs also occasionally participate in the demonstrations held to demand more government aid for the problems of the aged. Thus, the elders' clubs serve multiple functions: community service, study and action aimed at helping elders, group recreation, group identification, and mutual support among the elders.

Nevertheless, the international survey shows that fewer Japanese tend to participate in such leisure group activities than others do (table 8-3). This is further evidence of the strong work and family orientation among Japanese elders.

Table 8-3. Fewer Japanese elders participate in leisure group activities (percentages of persons 60+ participating "often" or "sometimes," multiple answers)

Activity	Japan	United States	Great Britain	France
Political	6	22	6	3
Religious	13	63	38	29
Evening courses	6	19	4	1
Social gatherings	6	68	44	34
Clubs/hobby groups	13	44	34	19
Sports	7	20	9	8
Community volunteer	14	30	13	16
Other	25	33	10	23
One or more activity	49	90	70	58
Mean percentage participating per activity	11	37	20	17

Source: Office for the Aged, 1981.



## SATISFACTIONS

What activities are most frequently satisfying? The older men most often say job-related activities are most satisfying, while the older women say family activities are most satisfying (Prime Minister's Office, 1973). This shows a continuation among the elders of the tradition that a woman's place is in the home, and a man's place is the world of work. Only 15 percent mentioned hobbies as a satisfying activity, and only 4 percent mentioned social activities. This again shows the strong work orientation of the Japanese.

How do Japanese elders compare with others in terms of satisfaction with their activities and situation? The results from several different questions in the international survey all agree that the Japanese elders tend to have higher levels of satisfaction than others. More of the Japanese elders say they are "very happy" than those in any other country (table 8-4). Japanese elders report fewer concerns than do the others (table 3-2). Many more of the Japanese elders report that their happiest occasion occurred in old age (table 8-5). Finally, more of the Japanese say they are seldom or never lonely (66 percent) than those in the other countries (59 to 61 percent) (Office for the Aged, 1981). Since these statistics are directly comparable, they are strong evidence that Japanese elders tend to be more satisfied than those in the other industrial countries.

Table 8-4. More Japanese elders say they are happy  
(percentage distributions of persons 60+)

Degree of happiness	Japan	United States	Great Britain	France
Very happy	49	30	28	4
Fairly happy	20	23	26	18
Same as others my age	22	40	38	64
Less happy than others	6	4	2	10
Unhappy	1	2	1	1
No answer	3	2	5	3

Source: Office for the Aged, 1981.

Table 8-5. More Japanese elders had their happiest occasion in old age (percentage distributions of persons 60+)

Happiest occasion occurred in	Japan	United States	Great Britain	France
Childhood	2	2	1	4
Youth	8	33	8	29
Age 26-45	25	39	70	45
Age 46-59	31	13	11	11
Age 60+	34	13	10	11

Source: Office for the Aged, 1981.

This evidence is also consistent with findings from an earlier survey which showed that Japanese elders reported a rising pattern of satisfaction from past to present and future (that is, ratings for present satisfaction were higher than those for past satisfaction, and those for future expected satisfaction were highest of all); while older Americans reported decreasing satisfaction from past to present and future (Cantril, 1965).

We believe a major reason for the high present satisfaction of Japanese elders is that in fact the present situation of most is better than their situations during World War II and the postwar years.

#### TRENDS

Fears about old age appear to have increased since 1964. In 1960 and in 1964, 28 percent of persons over age twenty said they sometimes have fears about old age, but by 1971 that proportion had increased to 36 percent (National Life Center, 1972). This is probably due to an increasing recognition of the problems of old age. On the other hand, almost two-thirds reported no worries about old age.

What is the outlook for activities and satisfaction among Japanese elders? The pattern of activities will probably become somewhat more similar to those in other industrial countries if the

proportion retired and the proportion living in independent households continue to increase. Specifically, we expect that the number of leisure and nonfamily activities will increase.

However, because the proportions continuing employment and living in joint households will probably remain substantially higher in Japan, there will continue to be substantially less leisure and nonfamily activities than in other countries. Furthermore, we expect that the Japanese culture will continue to make its distinctive imprint through the popularity of such Japanese hobbies as *bonsai*, flower arranging, tea ceremony, *haiku*, *shigin*, *go*, *shōgi*, *shamisen*, *koto*, and calligraphy (see explanations under "Activities" earlier in this chapter).

The future satisfaction of Japanese elders will depend on the trends in health, family relations, retirement, income, and respect discussed earlier. All these trends seem to indicate either little change or some improvement. Therefore, it seems most probable that the future levels of satisfaction will remain relatively high or will increase somewhat.

#### ACTIVITY VERSUS DISENGAGEMENT

As stated in the introductory chapter, one of the two main theories guiding this study of Japanese elders is disengagement theory. The opposing viewpoint is known as activity theory. In order to evaluate the evidence we found, it is necessary to understand the main propositions of these two conflicting theories. Havighurst summarized as follows:

(Activity theory) implies that, except for the inevitable changes in biology and in health, older people are the same as middle-aged people, with essentially the same psychological and social needs. In this view, the decreased social interaction that characterizes old age results from the withdrawal by society from the aging person; and the decrease in interaction proceeds against the desires of most aging men and women. The older person who ages optimally is the person who stays active and who manages to resist the

shrinkage of his social world. He maintains the activities of middle age as long as possible and then finds substitutes for those activities he is forced to relinquish: substitutes for work when he is forced to retire; substitutes for friends and loved ones whom he loses by death. (Havighurst, 1968, p. 161)

In contrast, the disengagement theory states:

The decreased social interaction is interpreted as a process characterized by mutuality; one in which both society and the aging person withdraw, with the aging individual acceptant, perhaps even desirous of the decreased interaction. It is suggested that the individual's withdrawal has intrinsic, or developmental, qualities; . . . and that, in this sense, disengagement is a natural rather than an imposed process. In this view, the older person who has a sense of psychological well-being will usually be the person who has reached a new equilibrium characterized by a greater psychological distance, altered types of relationships, and decreased social interaction with the persons around him. (Havighurst, 1968, p. 161)

Thus, there are two main points of contention between these theories: (1) Disengagement theory claims that withdrawal of aging persons from activity and involvement is intrinsic, natural, and typical; while activity theory maintains that withdrawal is not intrinsic, natural, or typical, and that when withdrawal occurs it is usually imposed by society in opposition to the natural needs and desires of normal aging persons. (2) Disengagement theory implies that disengagement leads to better health through the conservation of dwindling energy and to better psychological well-being; while activity theory asserts that continued activity and involvement tend to maintain health and life satisfaction. In short, disengagement theory asserts that disengagement is normal, healthy, and satisfying; activity theory asserts that activity is normal, healthy, and satisfying.

Which theory is supported by a comparison of Japan with other industrial countries? First, we have seen how the Japanese

Table 8-6. Those who continue working are healthier  
(percentage distributions of Japanese over 60)

Health	Working	Not working
Good	44	23
Average	41	39
Poor	15	38
Total	100	100

Source: Prime Minister's Office, 1973.

elders are more active and involved in their families and in jobs than the others. Second, we have seen that the Japanese elders appear to be as healthy or healthier than the others. Third, we have seen that Japanese elders tend to report more satisfaction than the others. These three facts support the activity theory that activity is usually healthy and satisfying.

Which theory is supported when we compare the more active with the more disengaged elders in Japan? We find that older Japanese who keep working and older Japanese who favor continued work are healthier (tables 8-6 and 8-7). We also find that those who like doing voluntary activities are healthier than those who do not (table 8-8). Finally, those who continue working and those who like doing voluntary work more often report life satisfaction than those who are not working and those who do

Table 8-7. Those who favor continued work are healthier ,  
(percentage distribution of Japanese over 60)

Attitude	Good health	Average health	Poor health
It is better to work as long as possible	86	74	67
It is better not to work in old age	11	18	22
No answer; don't know	3	8	10
Total	100	100	100

Source: Prime Minister's Office, 1973.

Table 8-8. Those who like doing volunteer activities are healthier (percentage distributions of Japanese over 60)

Attitude	Good health	Average health	Poor health
Like voluntary activities	46	37	29
Don't like voluntary activities	25	32	37
No answer; don't know	29	31	34
Total	100	100	100

Source: Prime Minister's Office, 1973.

not like voluntary activities (table 8-9). Thus, among Japanese elders activity is associated with better health and more life satisfaction. The difficulty with interpreting these facts as supporting activity theory is the old "chicken and egg" problem: which comes first? It may be that better health and satisfaction are what causes greater activity, rather than the other way round. Our interpretation would be that activity, health, and satisfaction are three mutually reinforcing factors: activity promotes better health and satisfaction because activity involves physical exercise, mental stimulation, and social interaction; better health makes possible more activity and is a universal value directly causing more satisfaction; satisfaction stimulates activity, while

Table 8-9. More of those who continue working and who like doing voluntary activities have life satisfaction (percentage distributions of Japanese over 60)

	Working	Not working	Like voluntary activities	Don't like voluntary activities
Have life satisfaction	83	65	84	66
Have no life satisfaction	17	35	16	34
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: Prime Minister's Office, 1973.

despair and depression lead to inactivity; satisfaction also leads to better mental and physical health through various psychosomatic mechanisms. Thus, the association of activity, health, and satisfaction among Japanese elders supports activity theory rather than disengagement theory.

This association is similar to most findings on this topic in the United States (for a review see Palmore, 1981).

#### SUMMARY

Japanese elders have less leisure time than others because the Japanese spend more time at work and doing housework. Therefore, they engage in fewer leisure activities. Among the most frequent activities are watching television, reading, gardening, traveling, and crafts and arts. About half the elders have distinctively Japanese hobbies.

Men most often report job-related activities as most satisfying, whereas women most often report family activities as most satisfying. Few report hobbies as most satisfying. However, Japanese elders tend to have higher levels of satisfaction than others.

The outlook is for growing similarity in patterns of activity between the Japanese and others, but distinctive Japanese activities will remain popular and the amount of leisure activity will remain lower in Japan. The future levels of satisfaction will probably remain at the present relatively high levels or increase somewhat.

Activity theory is supported by the cross-cultural comparisons: the Japanese are more active and involved in work and family, are as healthy or healthier than others, and are more satisfied. Activity theory is also supported by comparisons of the more active with the less active Japanese: the more active persons are healthier and more satisfied. We conclude that activity, health, and satisfaction are three mutually reinforcing factors.



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## Conclusions



Autumn years of life  
need not decline. They can be  
opportunity.

### CULTURE CAN MAINTAIN STATUS OF AGED

The first purpose of this study was to examine the integration and status of older Japanese in order to find out whether modernization necessarily causes low integration and status. The evidence indicates that, although there has been some decline, the status and integration of Japanese elders are still substantially higher than those of elders in other industrial countries.

The health status of Japanese elders has been improving with better nutrition, sanitation, and medical care so that they are now about as healthy as the aged in other modern countries. The Japanese elders are much more integrated into their families as shown by their living arrangements and functions in the household. Furthermore, the decline in proportions living with children has been slow: if past rates continue, the majority will still be living with their children during at least the next two decades.

The employment rate of elders in Japan is much higher than in other industrial countries: over half of those ever employed continue to be employed. Most of those working want to continue to work, and most of those not working are voluntary retirees. The seniority system gives the elders disproportionate power in legislatures, business, and other institutions.

The trends indicate small declines in future employment rates

and increasing similarity between elders and others in occupation and industry. Pensions and retirement benefits are rapidly improving, and the system of family support when needed usually assures at least the necessities of life. Income adequacy has improved so that there are fewer Japanese elders with economic difficulties than in any of the other industrial countries.

The main explanation for their relatively high status and integration is the tradition of respect for elders that has its roots in the vertical society and in religious doctrines of filial piety. Respect and affection for the elders are shown on a daily basis by honorific language; bowing; priority for the elders in seating, serving, bathing, and going through doors. It is also reflected in popular sayings, celebrations of special birthdays, the Respect for Elders Day, the National Law for Welfare of the Aged, special programs for elders, and the power of elders in society.

We therefore conclude that the theory of low status for the aged as a necessary result of industrialization is false. On the contrary, Japan shows that a tradition of respect for elders can maintain relatively high status and integration despite some declines.

This conclusion also challenges the Marxian theory that culture and social structure are primarily determined by the economic system and that a person's status is determined by his relationship to the means of production. If this theory were applicable to the Japanese elders, the high degree of industrialization in Japan and the elders' lower level of employment (compared to agricultural societies) would cause them to have a low status. On the contrary, their relatively high status supports the Weberian theory that culture can have an independent effect on the economic and social structure, as shown by the effect of the tradition of respect for elders on their status and integration into the family, economy, and community. This is not to deny that changes in the economic system have had substantial effects on the cultural and social structure, as well as on the status of the elders. It simply shows that culture can also have independent effects.

How does this conclusion compare to the conclusions of Cowgill and Holmes's major cross-cultural study, *Aging and Mod-*

ernization (1972)? They recognize three exceptions to the theory of low status for the aged in modern societies: Russia, migrants to Israel from Oriental societies, and "possibly" the case of Ireland. I believe Japan should be added to this list of exceptions.

In *Aging and Modernization*, David Plath gives his impressions that emphasize the negative and unhappy aspects of aging in Japan (pp. 133-50). I believe these impressions are one-sided for two reasons: he apparently had access to little of the statistical data we have presented, and he tends to emphasize the negative aspects of the data he does present. For example, he interprets the high suicide rate among older Japanese as a symptom of low and unhappy status; a more likely explanation is that Japanese culture tends to produce more suicides at all ages. In another example he quotes one person as estimating that "one in five old people is not effectively included in day-to-day family conversation and activity" (p. 142). Even assuming this estimate to be accurate (one in ten would probably be more accurate), one could look at the other side and conclude that most of the aged are highly integrated into their families because four out of five are effectively included in day-to-day family conversation and activity. For a third example, he states, "And six per cent of those living with a child openly told interviewers that they would rather be living elsewhere right then—if there were some place to go" (p. 143). Again, one could turn this around and say that 94 percent of those living with a child reported no desire to live elsewhere. In fairness, Plath admits, "I have tended to paint the darker side of aging in Japan" (p. 150). As a result, his picture is a gloomy distortion of the reality enjoyed by most Japanese elders.

In their final chapter Cowgill and Holmes list a series of propositions about the relationships between modernization and aging. The evidence from Japan supports ten of those propositions but contradicts or fails to support three of them. The evidence is unclear on three propositions dealing with primitive societies. The supported propositions are:

1. Longevity is directly and significantly related to the degree of modernization.

2. Modernized societies have older populations: i.e., higher proportions of old people.
3. Modern societies have higher proportions of women and especially of widows.
4. Modern societies have higher proportions of people who live to be grandparents and even great grandparents.
5. The status of the aged is high in societies in which there is a high reverence for or worship of ancestors.
6. The status of the aged is high in those societies in which they are able to continue to perform useful and valued functions; however, this is contingent upon the values of the society as well as upon the specific activities of the aged.
7. The status of the aged is high in societies in which the extended form of the family is prevalent and tends to be lower in societies that favor the nuclear form of the family and neolocal marriage.
8. With modernization the responsibility for the provision of economic security for dependent aged tends to be shifted from the family to the state.
9. The individualistic value system of Western society tends to reduce the security and status of older people.
10. An increasing tendency toward disengagement appears to accompany modernization.

The propositions contradicted or not supported by Japan are:

1. The status of the aged is inversely proportional to the rate of social change. (Japan has experienced one of the fastest rates of social change.)
2. The status of the aged tends to be high in agricultural societies and lower in urbanized societies. (The status of the aged in Japan appears to be as high or higher than that in many agricultural societies.)
3. The proportion of the aged who are able to maintain leadership roles declines with modernization. (Japan now appears to have a proportion of aged in leadership roles similar to that before modernization.)

All the above propositions were derived from the findings of eighteen different investigators in as many different contemporary countries. Nevertheless, the evidence from Japan contradicts or questions three of the basic propositions. These three propositions need to be revised to take into account this new evidence.

#### ACTIVITY THEORY

The second purpose of this study was to examine the evidence from Japan bearing on the controversy between disengagement and activity theory. There are several aspects to these theories, and they have been stated with varying degrees of caution or extremeness. In order to simplify and clarify the points of contention we have focused on two main questions: Is disengagement intrinsic, natural, and typical, or is it imposed by society in opposition to the natural needs and desires of normal aging persons? Does disengagement promote better health and life satisfaction, or does continued activity promote better health and satisfaction?

Stated in these simple and extreme forms, it should be obvious that neither theory will apply to all persons in all places. Some older people in some cultures typically disengage, and for some of these people health and satisfaction are maintained by their disengagement. Other older people typically maintain high levels of activity, and for some of these people health and satisfaction are maintained by their activity. Specification of the factors that determine whether a person will disengage or remain active, and specification of the conditions under which disengagement or activity will be beneficial, are the next major areas of research needed in this controversy.

Furthermore, it should be obvious that the *amount* of disengagement or activity can vary enormously and on different levels, such as the physical, psychological, and social. Disengagement theorists would not argue that extreme disengagement to the point of no physical activity, no mental activity, and no social interaction is either typical or beneficial. And activity theorists would not argue that frantic physical, mental, or social activity is typical or beneficial. The real question is what level

and what mix of activity and disengagement are most typical and most beneficial for different types of older persons. Thus, broad generalizations about unspecified levels of activity are not very useful for a given individual.

But this is true of most broad generalizations, and if the above qualifications and complications are kept in mind, it can be useful on the theoretical level to see which general theory the evidence tends to support.

The comparisons of Japanese elders to the others found that the Japanese are more active and involved in family and work, that they are about as healthy, and that they report more happiness and fewer concerns.

Second, comparisons of the more active Japanese elders with the more disengaged found that the more active are healthier and more satisfied. We recognize the "chicken and egg" problem here and interpret the data as showing that activity, health, and satisfaction are three mutually reinforcing factors. Therefore, we conclude that the evidence from Japan tends to support activity theory rather than disengagement theory.

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES

Our third purpose was to find patterns of attitudes and behaviors in Japan which might suggest ways that the United States could adopt to improve the situation of its elders. We will proceed from relatively simple ideas to the more complex.

1. Respect for Elders Day is a popular national holiday and apparently succeeds in encouraging respect for the elders and a greater awareness of their problems, as well as actions to reduce these problems. Labor Day and Veterans Day in the United States are similar national holidays that recognize the contributions of labor and veterans as well as encouraging more recognition of their problems. Mother's Day and Father's Day are not official government holidays but are widely observed in a variety of ways to recognize the contributions of mothers and fathers. Thus, there seems to be ample precedent for establishing an Older Americans Day in the United States that would be similar in function to Japan's Respect for Elders Day. One difficulty is



that while laborers, veterans, mothers, and fathers are generally proud, or at least not ashamed, of their status, many older Americans are ashamed of their status and try to deny their old age. Presumably, if an Older Americans Day could be established, it would help reduce this shame about old age. Recently there has been an attempt to establish a "Grandparent's Day" (the first Sunday after Labor Day), but so far it has had little success.

2. The Japanese also use the seventieth and other special birthdays as occasions to honor the elders and to express affection for them. Americans (and Japanese) sometimes use the twenty-first birthday as an occasion to recognize the new adult. Other rites of passage for the young are confirmation or bar mitzvah, graduation, marriage, and christening ceremonies. There are few such ceremonies for older Americans. Sometimes a golden wedding anniversary (after fifty years of marriage) becomes an occasion for recognizing and showing affection for older couples. Sometimes retirement parties are held to recognize an employee's contribution. It might also be useful for Americans to observe the sixty-fifth birthday with special celebrations in order to encourage more respect and affection for our elders.

3. In our supposedly egalitarian society it is unlikely that Americans would adopt forms of deference toward older people such as bowing and honorific language. Nevertheless, we do have a weak tradition of "age before beauty" when going through doors and when serving people. This saying implies that the aged are not beautiful, and therefore we believe it should not be perpetuated. However, it may be that strengthening and extending the tradition of precedence for older persons would help restore more respect for elders and more self-respect among older persons themselves.

4. We also have a weak tradition of giving seats to elders on crowded public transportation. This could be reinforced, as the Japanese have done, by regulations that give priority to older persons for a certain number of seats in each bus or train. In addition to recognizing special privileges for elders, this would facilitate the ease of travel of older persons, more of whom must rely exclusively on public transportation.



5. In Japan the police and firemen periodically visit elders living alone to see if they are getting along all right and to advise them on crime, accident, and fire prevention. Presumably, this could be done by police and firemen in the United States between calls and would require little extra expenditure.

6. It is a widespread practice for Japanese of all ages to begin their day with some kind of group exercise. This is carried over into homes for the aged in which the day typically begins with a combination of group exercise and folk dance in rhythm to music. Such morning exercise is widely recognized as an excellent way to preserve physical and mental functioning. When it is done on a group basis, there is the added satisfaction of social support and interaction. Instituting such programs of exercise for older Americans should improve their physical and mental health.

7. The Japanese government encourages and subsidizes sports days for the elders. Generally, this takes the form of various track and field events that are not too strenuous for healthy older persons. If the U.S. government encouraged and subsidized such sports days for older Americans, this too should improve the physical and mental health of those who participate.

Similarly, many local Japanese governments support and encourage gate-ball among elders by providing space, equipment, and instructors. There have been studies and reports that playing gate-ball tends to reduce doctors' visits and improve physical and mental health. If U.S. local governments supported and encouraged shuffleboard and other such moderately active sports for elders, this too should contribute to better mental and physical health.

8. Another program to improve the health of Japanese elders is the free annual health examination that is followed by more detailed examinations and treatments for those who need them. The present Medicare program for older Americans does not cover such routine examinations. It would seem that with only a modest cost to the program, it could be extended to cover an annual examination in order to detect and prevent the development of many serious diseases.

9. Starting in 1973, the Japanese government began provid-

ing almost free medical care to most Japanese over age seventy. Some cities provide free medical care to their residents between the ages of sixty-five and seventy. The present Medicare program in the United States covers less than one-half the medical care costs of older Americans. Completely free medical care would remove the high financial barriers that remain between many older Americans and adequate medical care. This would not only improve the health of older Americans and thus improve their life satisfaction directly, but it would also prevent the depletion of financial resources that so often results from the expenses of serious illness.

10. Perhaps the most important single idea we could benefit by is the provision of more employment opportunities for older persons. Japanese older persons are not only permitted, but are expected, to continue working or doing housework of some kind as long as they are able. The Japanese believe that employment of elders can contribute to their physical and mental health, to their life satisfaction, to their financial independence, and to the nation's productivity. There is considerable evidence in both Japan and the United States that they are correct in this belief (Palmore et al., 1985). The United States could try some of the employment programs that have been successful in Japan: a specialist for older workers assigned to each employment office; government wage subsidies for older workers hired through employment offices; provision of elder "Talent Banks" and "Silver Human Resource Centers" to help elders find part-time jobs; establishment of affirmative action programs for older workers with target levels of employment based on industry-wide percentages of workers age fifty-five and over; subsidies and loans to businesses for increasing employment and retraining of older workers.

11. Another idea to improve the financial position of U.S. elders would be to increase the savings rate at all ages. Japanese save an astounding 20 percent of disposable income, which is about four times as much as Americans save (Statistics Bureau, 1983). If Americans saved more for old age, they would be more financially secure and their savings would increase the amounts of capital available for investment in the nation.

12. An idea with potentially great benefit is more integration of older persons into the families of their children and grandchildren. It appears unlikely that Americans will greatly increase the proportions of older persons living with their children. But it may be feasible and desirable for more older Americans to live near enough to their children and grandchildren to contribute more fully to their household activities. On the one side, this would decrease the isolation and inactivity of many older persons, and on the other side it would reduce the parents' burdens of child care, housekeeping, and household maintenance.

13. The Japanese have a nationwide system of government-supported Elders Clubs, to which about half the elders belong. As we have indicated, these clubs function not only to provide community service, group study, and recreation, but also to provide mutual support and self-pride among the elders. In the United States there are some Senior Citizens Clubs, and some get some government support. But compared to Japan, these clubs are few and weak. The National Institute of Senior Aging estimates that less than 5 percent of Americans over sixty-five belong to any such clubs. If Americans followed Japan's example and established more—and more active—Senior Citizens Clubs, we too could reap the benefits of greatly expanded community service as well as providing opportunities for group study and recreation, mutual support, and self-pride to the majority of our older citizens.

14. Only 1.6 percent of Japanese elders live in long-term care institutions, which is about one-third the rate in the United States. Many Japanese would like to increase this by about 1 percent, and we do not propose that the United States try to reduce its number of institutionalized elders to Japan's rate. But we do suggest that the United States could substantially reduce its institutionalization by following Japan's example in providing more homemaker services, home health aides, visiting nurses, day care centers, respite care, tax credits for care of the bedfast and for housing alterations to allow care for elders at home.

15. Finally, we come to the most complex and yet fundamental way in which we could learn from the Japanese: respect

for elders and self-respect among the elders. We have seen how respect for Japanese elders is rooted in the basic social structure of their "vertical society" and in their religion of ancestor worship and filial piety. But the very idea of a vertical society and of ancestor worship would seem alien, if not completely repugnant, to most Americans. Yet it is the main thesis of this book that respect for the aged is the key element that can maintain the status and integration of the aged in modern industrial societies. Therefore, in order to improve the status and integration of elder Americans, it is necessary to somehow improve our respect for the aged. Instead of the vertical society, perhaps we could use our egalitarian ideology that all persons are entitled to respect because they are human beings, regardless of race, sex, or age. Instead of ancestor worship, perhaps we could use the Judeo-Christian commandment, "Honor thy father and mother," to increase respect for the aged. Perhaps we could revive the beliefs that "experience is the best teacher" and that knowledge can come from books but only years of experience can provide wisdom. Whatever the method or ideological base, it seems probable that respect for older Americans must be substantially increased before their status and integration will be substantially increased.

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR JAPAN

Just as the United States could improve the situation of its elders by adapting ideas from Japan, Japan could improve the situation of its elders by adapting some ideas from the United States. We will discuss four such suggestions.

① 1. *Increase Options for Living Arrangements.* In comparison to the United States and other Western countries, the living arrangement options for elder Japanese are rather limited. In the United States there are many more options such as retirement communities, public housing apartments for elders, life care, and retirement homes.

There are thousands of retirement communities in the United States: towns or residential areas or condominiums that are re-

stricted to older people without young children. In Japan there are none. Many elders in the United States prefer to live in retirement communities because of the special services and facilities for elders available and because all their neighbors are of similar age and status and have similar interests and values. We expect that only a minority of Japanese would choose this option (because of strong family and community ties), but we believe that some Japanese elders would enjoy and benefit from it if available.

In the United States there are also thousands of large public housing projects for the elderly: apartment housing that is built by the government especially for low-income elders and whose rent is correspondingly modest and based on income. In Japan there were only twenty-two small projects in 1983, which altogether housed only about one thousand people. Thus, for practical purposes, this option does not exist for most low-income Japanese elders.

In the United States, an increasingly popular option is the life care community in which middle-income elders go to live when they are healthy and buy a guarantee that they will be cared for during the rest of their life as needed. Such communities are often backed by churches or other charitable institutions. There were about four hundred such communities in the United States in 1984.

Similarly, in the United States over 5 percent of elders live in retirement or nursing homes, which provide congregate meals and usually nursing care as needed. As we have noted, only 1.6 percent of Japanese elders are in such homes, and it is generally agreed that there is a severe shortage of such homes. One result of this shortage is that patients are kept in hospitals longer: the average length of stay in Japanese general hospitals is forty-five days, as compared to only eight days in the United States (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 1984b). Thus, Japan could significantly reduce its health care expenses by moving more elders from the relatively expensive hospital beds to less expensive nursing home beds (if they were available).

2. *Raise Compulsory Retirement Age.* In the United States

compulsory retirement because of age prior to age seventy became illegal in 1980. In Japan there is no such restriction, and most large firms have compulsory retirement policies at ages between fifty-five and sixty. Most Americans now believe that forcing people to retire just because they are fifty-five or sixty, when they are able and eager to keep working, is unfair age discrimination. If Japan had a similar restriction against compulsory retirement because of age, there would be more employment opportunities for its elders, their earnings would increase, the burden of taxes for social security and contributions to pension funds could be reduced, and the nation's productivity could be increased. We recognize that the Japanese government is providing several incentives for companies to raise their compulsory retirement age; but so far such programs, based on voluntary compliance, have had little success. Few companies have raised their compulsory retirement age to seventy or beyond. A law prohibiting compulsory retirement until age seventy would bring about faster change.

3. *More Leisure Activities.* We have seen how Japanese elders are more work-oriented than elders in other countries. As a result, they participate in relatively few leisure activities (chapter 8). Thus, when they have to retire, they often feel at a loss as to what to do with their leisure time and how to enjoy retirement. Most Americans look forward to retirement and participate in about three times more leisure activities in old age than do the Japanese. If Japanese elders developed more leisure activities, it could increase their enjoyment of retirement and might even improve their physical and mental health.

4. *More Gerontology.* In Japan gerontology is a relatively recent and underdeveloped field for research and education. There is a total of about seven hundred members in the two gerontological societies combined (social and biomedical). In contrast, there are over five thousand members of the Gerontological Society of America and several thousand more who belong to regional gerontological societies. Thus, Japan has less than one-fourth the ratio of gerontologists to population that the United States has. In the United States there are about two thousand



colleges and universities that teach courses on aging. In Japan there are almost none. In the United States there are over one hundred centers or institutes on aging. In Japan there are only two or three.

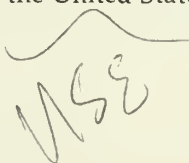
This underdevelopment of gerontology in Japan is due to several factors: the belief that there would be little or no problems of aging if children took care of their parents as expected; the lack of national funds for basic research in general and gerontology in particular; the identification of gerontology with the applied sciences and practitioners, which gives it lower prestige. (Geriatrics is better developed; the Japan Geriatrics Society has about 3,300 members.)

However, we believe Japan needs to develop gerontology for at least three reasons: (1) to make its distinctive contribution to the rapidly developing international science of gerontology; (2) to train the many doctors, nurses, social workers, and other professionals who will be needed to care for the rapidly increasing numbers of aged requiring care; and (3) to inform and educate the public about the facts on aging and reduce the misconceptions in this area.

#### IDEALS

In closing, let us make it clear that we are not proposing for either country a culture which assumes that the aged are superior simply because they are older (as was true in pre-World War II Japan). Nor are we proposing a gerontocracy in which the aged have most of the power and rewards (as in feudal Japan). But we do believe that prejudices against elders should be overcome so that they get equal respect with all other human beings; and we do believe that discrimination against elders in employment, in families, and in communities should be eliminated so that they can enjoy an equal share of power and rewards.

Those who agree with these ideals could learn from the land of "The Honorable Elders." The Japanese, in turn, could learn from the United States as well. All persons in all countries could





learn about the problems and potentials of elders by comparing the situation of elders in Japan with those in other countries. Such comparisons will broaden the base of gerontology and enlarge our vision of possible ways to improve the quality of our later years.

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